

The Road From Damascus

New Arrival Immigrant Families and The Swedish Preschool

Wiji Bohme Shomary



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Abstract

The overall aim of this doctoral thesis is to examine the perceptions that new arrival immigrant families have of Swedish preschool, and the perceptions of these families as expressed by the Swedish state preschool political discourse over the last fifty-year period. For this purpose, the study uses critical discourse analysis, as proposed by Norman Fairclough. CDA is applied both as theory and as analytical method. The study is empirically grounded and borrows Fairclough's three-dimensional model of discourse for the analysis of 19 texts produced by new arrival Syrian families, along with policy documents, the reports of government commissions and government bills dealing with preschool in relation to immigration. The study focuses on two main themes that are predominant in both texts—language learning (Swedish and mother tongue) and belonging—and shows how they are used to express and assign agency.

In the study, special attention is paid to the use of verbs, pronouns and adjectives as linguistic parameters for analyzing representations of relational and action processes, as well as social actor representations. The thesis consists of three empirical chapters: New Arrival Immigrant Families' Discourse about Language Learning, New Arrival Immigrant Families' Discourse about Belonging and Preschool, and New Arrival Immigrant Children as a Concern for Preschool. The first two chapters demonstrate a high degree of agency employed by the parents and their children in relation to language learning and being at preschool, reflected in their use of verbs and pronouns. The last chapter demonstrates how, over a period of fifty years, state preschool political discourse has perceived and constructed immigrant children and their parents in relation to preschool.

The analysis reveals points of convergence and divergence between the parents' and the state's discursive practices about preschool as a place for language learning and belonging. For instance, in the state discourse, immigrant children's language learning and belonging are defined in terms of their needs and immigrant experience. In the parents' writings, these themes are emphasized in relation to the children's development and wellbeing. The study emphasizes the importance of culture-conscious work, in which the shared interests and expectations of both parties are highlighted, rather than only the differences in their views. Preschool is further discussed as presenting an ideological dilemma, allowing for contradictory ideals to coexist as a reflection of the political diversity of Swedish society.

Keywords: *Early childhood education, new arrival immigrant families, preschool, critical discourse analysis, state preschool political discourse, language learning, belonging, agency.*

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To dad and mom

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Abstract

The overall aim of this doctoral thesis is to examine the perceptions that new arrival immigrant families have of Swedish preschool, and the perceptions of these families as expressed by the Swedish state preschool political discourse over the last fifty-year period. For this purpose, the study uses critical discourse analysis, as proposed by Norman Fairclough. CDA is applied both as theory and as analytical method. The study is empirically grounded and borrows Fairclough's three-dimensional model of discourse for the analysis of 19 texts produced by new arrival Syrian families, along with policy documents, the reports of government commissions and government bills dealing with preschool in relation to immigration. The study focuses on two main themes that are predominant in both texts—language learning (Swedish and mother tongue) and belonging—and shows how they are used to express and assign agency.

In the study, special attention is paid to the use of verbs, pronouns and adjectives as linguistic parameters for analyzing representations of relational and action processes, as well as social actor representations. The thesis consists of three empirical chapters: *New Arrival Immigrant Families' Discourse about Language Learning*, *New Arrival Immigrant Families' Discourse about Belonging and Preschool*, and *New Arrival Immigrant Children as a Concern for Preschool*. The first two chapters demonstrate a high degree of agency employed by the parents and their children in relation to language learning and being at preschool, reflected in their use of verbs and pronouns. The last chapter demonstrates how, over a period of fifty years, state preschool political discourse has perceived and constructed immigrant children and their parents in relation to preschool.

The analysis reveals points of convergence and divergence between the parents' and the state's discursive practices about preschool as a place for language learning and belonging. For instance, in the state discourse, immigrant children's language learning and belonging are defined in terms of their needs and immigrant experience. In the parents' writings, these themes are emphasized in relation to the children's development and wellbeing. The study emphasizes the importance of culture-conscious work, in which the shared interests and expectations of both parties are highlighted, rather than only the differences in their views. Preschool is further discussed as presenting an ideological dilemma, allowing for contradictory ideals to coexist as a reflection of the political diversity of Swedish society.

Keywords

Early childhood education, new arrival immigrant families, preschool, critical discourse analysis, state preschool political discourse, language learning, belonging, agency.

Abstrakt

Det övergripande syftet med denna doktorsavhandling är att undersöka de föreställningar som nyanlända invandrarfamiljer har av den svenska förskolan, och föreställningarna om dessa familjer såsom de uttryckts i den svenska statliga förskolepolitiska diskursen under den senaste femtioårsperioden. För detta ändamål använder studien kritisk diskursanalys (CDA), såsom föreslagits av Norman Fairclough. CDA tillämpas både som teori och som analytisk metod. Studien är empiriskt förankrad och lånar Faircloughs tredimensionella diskursmodell för analys av 19 texter producerade av nyanlända syriska familjer, tillsammans med policy- och styrdokument, SOU:er och regeringspropositioner som handlar om förskolan i relation till invandring. Studien fokuserar på två huvudteman som är dominerande i båda texterna — språkinläring (svenska och modersmål) och tillhörighet — och visar hur de används för att uttrycka och tilldela agens.

I studien ägnas särskild uppmärksamhet åt användningen av verb, pronomen och adjektiv som språkliga parametrar för att analysera representationer av relations- och handlingsprocesser, samt sociala aktörsrepresentationer. Studien består av tre empiriska kapitel: Nyanlända invandrarfamiljers diskurs om språkinläring, nyanlända invandrarfamiljers diskurs om tillhörighet och förskola och nyanlända invandrarbarn som en angelägenhet för förskolan. De två första kapitlen visar på hur föräldrarna skriver fram sin egen och barnens agens i förhållande till språkinläring och att vara på förskolan, vilket återspeglas i deras användning av verb och pronomen. Det sista kapitlet visar hur den statliga förskolepolitiska diskursen under en femtioårsperiod har uppfattat och konstruerat invandrarbarn och deras föräldrar i relation till förskolan.

Analysen avslöjar punkter av konvergens och divergens mellan föräldrarnas och statens diskursiva praktiker om förskolan som en plats för språkinläring och tillhörighet. Till exempel, i den statliga diskursen definieras invandrarbarns språkinläring och tillhörighet utifrån deras behov och invandrarerfarenhet. I föräldrarnas texter lyfts dessa teman i relation till barnens utveckling och välmående. Studien betonar vikten av kulturell medvetenhet, där båda parter gemensamma intressen och förväntningar lyfts fram, snarare än enbart skillnaderna i åsikter. Resultatet visar hur de olika diskurser om förskolan som kommer fram i studien kan förstås i termer av ett ideologiskt dilemma som möjliggör att motsägelsefulla ideal samexisterar som en återspeglning av det svenska samhällets politiska mångfald.

Nyckelord

Förskoledidaktik, nyanlända invandrarfamiljer, förskola, kritisk diskursanalys, statlig förskolepolitisk diskurs, språkinläring, tillhörighet, agens.

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List of Abbreviations

CDA: Critical Discourse Analysis.

ECEC: Early Childhood Education and Care.

Lpfö: Swedish National Curriculum for Preschool.

Prop: Government bill.

SCB: Statistics Sweden.

SFS: Swedish Code of Statutes.

SKOLFS: Swedish National Agency for Education Ordinance.

SOU: Swedish Government Official Report, report by Government commissions of inquiry.

Chapter 1:

Introduction

This thesis studies how Syrian new arrival immigrant families perceive Swedish preschool and, also, how Swedish state preschool political discourse perceives these families, including the children. The empirical context of the study concerns 19 families, who had been residing in Sweden for less than four years at the time of data collection, and had children aged 0–6 years enrolled in Swedish preschool. By family, I mean parents with children, sometimes single mothers with children and sometimes couples with children. One of the writers was a man and all the others were women. Preschool is one of the first encounters that new arrival immigrant families have with Swedish society, therefore it is essential to understand their experiences in order to know and make visible the existing norms within preschool, as well as what preschool as a state institution offers these families.

I asked parents to write about their impressions and perceptions of their encounter with Swedish preschool, and in this study I refer to these texts as a social practice producing a discourse about Swedish preschool. These parents are the people I call my informants and participants in the study. They are all Syrian new arrival refugee and immigrant families, and in this study I will refer to them as such. However, the data I examine and which constitutes part of the state preschool political discourse does not make a distinction between immigrants, refugees and new arrivals. In this thesis, I call my informants new arrival families; otherwise, when referring to other studies and the state preschool political discourse, I write about immigrants in general, with the understanding that it is a broader category which covers both refugees and new arrival immigrants.

In addition, I have analyzed the perceptions of immigrants in Swedish state preschool political discourse from the early 1970s until today. The texts in the state discourse use varying terms to address immigrants, and it is my understanding that “immigrant” is a broader category that covers both refugees and new arrivals. I also refer to these texts as part of the social practice producing a discourse about Swedish preschool. The state preschool political discourse and the production of texts by new arrival parents are part of the same discursive event.

The theory and method for investigation employed in this thesis are inspired by Critical Discourse Analysis, and more precisely by how a social theory of discourse can be used to analyze discourse (Fairclough, 1992). It is a theory that advances an empirically bottom-up approach, where language comes under scrutiny from different angles. In this thesis, my interest concerns in particular how discourse produces reality through ordinary people's use of language and through the state preschool political discourse. This thesis examines the insights that these arenas for text production yield for understanding the new arrivals' experiences of preschool, when they are studied in relation to one another. As the above implies, the study addresses the sociopolitical dimension of early childhood education, through the perceptions of the participants and the state discourse. It is not concerned with the didactic aspect, which lies beyond the scope of this study simply because the participants did not discuss how their children are taught writing, reading, counting, etc.

I continue this introduction by providing a context for my field of research. I also explain what is meant by the new arrivals I am focusing on, refugees from the Syrian war, and the role of Swedish preschool. I will then pay tribute to the title of the thesis and the choice of theoretical framework. I will also introduce what I refer to as the state preschool political discourse. This introductory chapter ends with a statement of the aim, the research questions and the outline of this thesis.

Becoming a “New Arrival” in Sweden

According to the UN Refugee Agency, UNHCR, about five and a half million Syrians have fled the civil war that started in March 2011. Many of them sought asylum in neighboring countries but, at the peak of the Syrian crisis in 2014–2015, many refugees came to Europe. In Syria, entire cities and villages were destroyed, some people were forced to flee repression at the hands of the regime, others fled the violence of the rebel groups, while still others fled the war in general, essentially searching for better lives for themselves and their children. The paths of their flight varied; some went to relatives in other parts of the country, becoming known as internally displaced people. Others found shelter in refugee camps in neighboring countries, and yet others decided to flee further by crossing the European continent on foot or risking their lives by crossing the Mediterranean Sea, partly in response to an announcement by the German Chancellor Angela Merkel, in which she welcomed refugees to her country (Tucci, 2016). Due to the war's harsh circumstances, many people were forced to leave their homes and families behind, and many of them lived through traumatic events before arriving in Sweden.

In 2015, Sweden received about 163 000 refugees, mainly from Syria (SCB, 2016), including more than 18 000 children, aged 0-6 years (Migrationsverket, 2016). According to the Swedish Migration Board, the number of

Syrian asylum seekers in Sweden for the year 2015 was 51 338.¹ In an international context, Sweden is considered to be a leader when it comes to integration policies, according to the Migrant Integration Policy Index, and Swedish preschool has committed to the global call to establish (socially) sustainable societies. This is manifested in Sweden's membership of the European Union, and sharing the values and commitments promoted by the OECD and UNESCO regarding the development of making Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) available to all (Lindgren & Söderlind, 2019; Sjöstrand Öhrfelt, 2019).

Other measures include working towards the fulfilment of the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and making the UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child into a national law in 2020. According to the government, this law means a clarification that courts and law enforcers must take into account the rights that follow from the Convention on the Rights of the Child for all children in Sweden. The rights of the child must be considered and assessed in decision-making processes in cases and matters concerning all children. The incorporation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child into Swedish law contributes to making the rights of the child visible. It is a way of creating the basis for a more child-rights-based approach in all public activities (Regeringskansliet, 2021).

The Curricula for Preschool, Lpfö98 and Lpför18, state that, in its work with children and other adults, Swedish preschool should respect the democratic values and human rights on which Swedish society is founded (Regeringskansliet, 1998; Skolverket, 2018). This is also expressed in the Education Act (SFS 2010:800).² However, as has been shown in previous research, the arrival of so many Syrian refugees in 2015 challenged the existing educational landscape in Sweden. In spite of the aim to promote diversity, cultural, linguistic and ethnic differences were identified as causing these challenges. Hence, the new arrivals were identified with causing problems, rather than contributing to diversity (Lunneblad, 2013; Nilsson & Bunar, 2015). As pointed out by Johannes Lunneblad (2017), implementing preschool policies as part of taking care of and aiming to integrate new arrivals requires preschool practitioners to possess special skills and knowledge. It is my aim to contribute to this field of early childhood education and care research. In Sweden, there is a shortage of research focusing on immigration and ethnicity in the preschool context, as pointed out in previous research (Ljunggren, 2018; Tallberg Broman et al., 2015; Björk-Willén, Gruber & Puskás, 2013; Zetterqvist Nelson & Hagström, 2016).

¹ Sw. "Migrationsverket." In Sweden, in 2015, the number of asylum seekers was the second highest per capita in the EU, just after Germany, compared to a few hundred annually during previous years. This led the government to introduce border controls.

² Sw. "skollagen."

This thesis seeks to give voice to new arrival families and to discover how they and their children perceive this first contact with Swedish society through preschool. In addition, the study seeks to understand how the state preschool political discourse defines immigrant families and children. This dual aim will increase our knowledge about new arrival immigrant families and preschool.

A Tribute to the Title and Choice of Theoretical Framework

The title of the thesis, “The Road from Damascus,” is an allusion to a life-changing event—migration—and underlines that what the migrant leaves behind is important for understanding what s/he is seeking. Mentioning Damascus in the title is a way of recognizing my informants, and acknowledging their experiences. The title is an invitation to the reader to view my informants as both emigrants and immigrants, as proposed by the French sociologist Abdelmalek Sayad, who conducted ethnographic work with Algerian migrants in France and French migration policies. An immigrant is always first an emigrant, according to Sayad (1999), leaving his/her country of origin. Pierre Bourdieu, explains that the focus on immigration alone damages our understanding of the migration phenomenon and leads to limiting “the study of migrants into an artificial problematic of ‘lack’ and deficiency explained away by ritualized reference, now to their lower class composition and substandard conditions of living, now to the peculiarities of the culture they have brought with them” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2000, p. 174).

In line with this, I want to point out that it is important to include the political aspect of migration in the analysis. The term “new arrival” emphasizes the importance of the destination at which migrants arrive; the term is an imposed label ascribed by the receiving country, which in this study is Sweden. Since the label is used in national policy, I have chosen to also use it in this study, even though my theoretical understanding is grounded in a critical tradition highlighting how discourse produces reality, and the discriminatory power invested in such categorization and labeling. In this thesis, I seek to acknowledge people arriving in Sweden as both emigrants and immigrants, and thus to avoid referring to them within a framework of deficiency and othering. I also wish to provide them with the necessary space to voice their own discourse on how they perceive meeting a new country’s preschool system. It has been argued that political discussions about migration exclude the migrants and refugees themselves (Messer, Schroeder & Wodak, 2012). Giving voice to new arrival immigrant families in this study means giving them an opportunity to participate and to raise issues that are of concern to them.

However, in addition to hearing the voices of new arrival immigrant families about their perceptions of Swedish preschool, I also aim to understand

how preschools have perceived, and still perceive, these families. Therefore, I also analyze the state preschool political discourse on immigrant children/parents/families from the 1970s until today.

When I started my research, the Syrian war was at its peak and the number of refugees fleeing to Europe was challenging the authorities. Even though we, myself and the participants in this study, have come from the same place and to the same place, from the beginning I refused the idea that we would be lumped together as the same because of our cultural or ethnic and social background. I do not identify myself in ethnic or cultural terms, and I do not see others in such terms either. At the same time, I was aware of my in-between cultural position as a representative of both a (female) person of Syrian background with a mastery of Arabic and as a researcher from a Swedish university knowing Swedish. Being able to approach the participants and make their experience visible is an advantage. The most difficult part was gaining their trust to open up and write about their perceptions of Swedish preschool, as I will describe in the section on the data producing stage, chapter four.

I have chosen a normative theory and method, more specifically a critical one: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which is interested in how people act in and via discourses. It is about content, relationships and identity. According to Norman Fairclough, “the discursive constitution of society does not emanate from a free play of ideas in people’s heads but from a social practice which is firmly rooted in and oriented to real, material social structures” (Fairclough, 1992, p. 66). *Discourse*, in the Faircloughian tradition, means “language use.” It is regarded as a form of social practice which, according to Fairclough, implies that discourse is both *a mode of action* and *a mode of representation* used by people to interact with the world and with each other. It also means that there exists a dialectical relationship between the discourse and social structures, meaning that discourse is shaped by, and at the same time shapes, social structures. This will be shown by how I use and interpret the three-dimensional model of a discursive event developed by Fairclough (1992, p. 73). Discourse has constructive effects on social identities, social relationships and systems of knowledge and beliefs. These effects, according to Fairclough, correspond to the functions of language, which are identity, relational and ideational functions.

Hence, to study discourse is to study society, where micro and macro are in a dialectical relationship, including discursive and non-discursive elements.³ *Critical*, according to Fairclough (1992), implies studying language as an inherently social practice that produces and reproduces the social, including the political. To be critical is to unearth connections and causes that

³ As opposed, for example, to discourse theory as explained by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, where there is nothing outside discourse. Both approaches draw upon Michel Foucault’s work, but differ with regard to their theorization of the discursive and non-discursive (Bergström & Boréus, 2012, pp. 401–402).

are hidden, taken for granted, and it implies intervention, for example providing resources for those who may be disadvantaged through change. I regard the participants in this study as being involuntarily subjected to change and in need of resources of a non-discriminatory nature when arriving in a new country, i.e. Sweden. I also see the informants as active agents, as people who “may resist or appropriate changes coming from above, as well as merely go along with them” (Fairclough, 1992, p. 9).

CDA is a “problem-based” scientific approach to studying societal inequalities, rather than being mere “political activism,” as described by its opponents or, as Widdowson (1995) accuses it, an ideological interpretation rather than an analysis. CDA analysts do not deny their advocacy role in combatting social injustice, but this stops at the “context of discovery,” which includes “the process of the selection of objects and questions under investigation” (Meyer, 2001, p. 17). CDA does not allow for value judgements in the “context of justification” but adheres to the Kantian epistemological tradition, in which “pure cognition” is simply impossible (Meyer, 2001). Since language is key to this theoretical framework, the most important result of such research is to achieve critical language awareness (Fairclough, 1992, p. 239).

The aim of critical theories is to transform existing political conditions, thus making them more just, egalitarian, emancipatory and democratic. Back in 2004, when *Critical Discourse Studies*, the interdisciplinary research journal for the advancement of CDA was just starting out, “the global upsurge in migration and the movement of refugees” was singled out as one of the most pressing problems to be highlighted in social research (Fairclough et al., 2004, p. 1). An era of new transnational systems would spawn insecurities over national identities, Fairclough and others argued. Moreover, it was claimed that the category “foreign” is part of the global system producing “unjust social relations based on arbitrary categories of age and racist classifications,” running in parallel with the “conflicts people experience because of unequal and unjust power relationships between those who speak different languages and dialects and identify with different cultural traditions” (Fairclough et al., 2004, pp. 1, 2). One identified hindrance to improved global justice is political biases in official textbooks and school curricula, according to this call for social research. It has also been argued that even the process of identifying problems and making categorizations is in itself a way of producing reality as problematic, and researchers must always reflect upon this.

As described above, I was reluctant to use the categorization of “new arrival,” but decided to remain with it in order to present the informants’ writings as addressing issues of concern to new arrivals. The problems I faced when starting to search for informants is indicative of the “trouble” my research interest faced when attempting to gain access to informants via representatives of preschool (see chapter four). It has also been a struggle to research this topic in relation to the state preschool political discourse, since it partly directs critique towards Swedish politics and what such politics aims to accomplish.

This was another kind of struggle, more indirect and immanent than being denied entry to meet new arrivals. However, it caused me to reflect upon my role as a researcher within Swedish society, and what is doable within that context.

By highlighting an area of research, the researcher is able to emphasize a certain social group's powerlessness in relation to others, and can therefore seek to empower this group. This is not to say that I understand my informants as being without power or resources. On the contrary, simply to become a new arrival is indicative of rich agency resources. What I mean is that I want to bring forward my informants' agency—or lack thereof—as a way to empower them and serve as increased resources of representation and participation. As I will show in chapters five and six, there are several examples where I interpret my informants' ways of writing their agency into their texts as a way to use my research as a resource for them.

The aim of critical theory is not only to understand a certain phenomenon for merely technical or practical purposes. Rather, it is based on a deliberate emancipatory focus with a dual intention, namely “to expose the operation of power and to bring about social justice” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018, p. 53). This transformative paradigm is constitutive of every part of the research process, not least due to its interrogative approach to existing power relations, and its fundamental beliefs in relation to the ontology, epistemology and methodology used by the researcher (Mertens, 2007).

My choice of critical theory for this study is based on a conviction that the researcher cannot stand outside reality and merely describe it; rather, we are part of it: “Analysts are not above the social practice they analyze; they are inside it” (Fairclough, 1992, p. 199).⁴ Studying the experiences of Syrian new arrival refugee families was, and still is, a hot topic and it is my hope that my contribution can deepen our understanding of the challenges met by this and other groups of new arrival and immigrant families.

New Arrival Immigrant Families and the State Preschool Political Discourse: An Introduction

During the fifty-year period I investigate, the terms used to address and describe immigrant, migrant, foreign and new arrival children have varied in preschool policy texts (Gruber & Puskás, 2013). Hence, studying new arrival immigrant families becomes a complex process since different terms imply different understandings. With this in mind, it could be interesting to examine how the political discourse has presented the scale of immigration. In the early

⁴“We are a part of it, and our critical reflections are also properly seen as critical self-reflections on our own positions, motivations, and actions” (Fairclough et al., 2004, p. 1).

1970s, there were about 64 000 “foreign citizens” ranging from newborns to children aged six years living in Sweden. “Foreign children” aged five to six numbered 17 000, or 7.2 percent, of all children in that age group (SOU 1972:27, p. 308).⁵ By the 1980s, 60 000 children of preschool age had parents with “another cultural background and another mother tongue than Swedish.”⁶ Eight percent of the population were “immigrants,” altogether speaking 130 languages (Prop. 1984/85:209 p. 5).⁷ In 2020, the proportion of children with a “foreign background” was 25 percent (SOU 2020:67, p. 102).⁸ Altogether, 156 000 children had a “foreign background,” and of these 31 000 were “born abroad,” which accounted for five percent of all children aged one to five in Sweden (SOU 2020:67, p. 95).⁹ As this shows, the way in which immigrant children have been presented and counted has shifted. However, there has been a consistent interest in counting and creating different categorizations related to immigration.

Since the early 1970s, preschool has been part of Sweden’s integration politics, with specific multicultural goals of preserving immigrants’ cultures (Lunneblad, 2013). In parallel with an emergent immigration policy,¹⁰ the question of how immigrant children ought to be a concern for preschool was raised (Gruber & Puskás, 2013). In that process, a key question was whether migrants should adapt to the host society or integrate. To integrate means to maintain a connection with the culture from which the migrants came. There was a concern that immigrants would not be included in the provision of general welfare and that preschool could be a tool to safeguard a societal development that was non-discriminatory (Gruber & Puskás, 2013).

At that time, there was also a major shift in “the state preschool politics” (Lindgren & Söderlind, 2019). A government commission’s report, followed by a governmental bill, presented how Swedish preschool should be developed and organized. Instead of regarding preschool as a necessary support for parents who could not organize childcare through private solutions, the aim was to make preschool “a service institution” for all working parents, as well as for the children (SOU 1972:26, p. 20; Prop. 1973:136, p. 14).¹¹ Half-day or full-day service should not be an issue as it had been before, and *preschool*

⁵ Sw. “utländska medborgare,” “utländska barn.”

⁶ Sw. “föräldrar med annan kulturbakgrund och annat modersmål än Svenska.”

⁷ Sw. “invandrare.”

⁸ Sw. “utländsk bakgrund.”

⁹ Sw. “utländsk bakgrund,” “utrikes födda.” It was explained that: “foreign background refers to children who were born abroad or domestically with two foreign-born guardians,” my translation.

¹⁰ Sw. “Invandringspolitik.”

¹¹ Sw. “serviceinstitution.”

was suggested as the concept to be used, regardless of differences in organization (Prop. 1973:136, p. 12).¹² The mission was dual—to support both the parents’ need for childcare and children’s need for stimulation and development, and these needs were regarded as an “indissoluble unit” (Prop. 1973:136, p. 14).¹³ In this emerging discourse, the *ideal family* consisted of two working parents with children in preschool (Lindgren & Söderlind, 2019).¹⁴ This included immigrants, and thus what I refer to as new arrival immigrant families. It was said that Swedish immigration policy was focused on helping immigrants *to keep the family together*. In this respect, Swedish policy differed from that of several other countries, according to the government commission’s report (SOU 1972:27, p. 308).¹⁵ In the government bill, preschool was conceptualized as a “family service” (Prop. 1973:136, p. 14).¹⁶

Hence, the state preschool political discourse presented a form of societalization of the needs of families—it became the responsibility of society to care for both parents and children, and this included immigrants. In that sense, and for the children, this meant that a new discourse of an ideal Swedish childhood materialized: “the preschool childhood” (Lindgren, 2003a; 2003b; 2006; 2020).¹⁷ In chapter seven, I show how this general notion of a preschool childhood as an ideal both included new arrival immigrant children and at the same time set up specific recommendations for their inclusion.

Educationalization, Preschool and the Nation

This emergent discourse of a state preschool politics can also be described as part of a larger trend towards educationalization in Western societies, where education is expected to meet and solve social and societal problems. According to this framework, transferring societal problems into education is a way to encourage social responsibility, and processes of educationalization are typically linked to reformations of the school system, according to the idea of

¹² Sw. “förskola.” If needed, the concepts of full-time preschool (Sw. heltidsförskola) and part-time preschool (Sw. deltidförskola) could be used.

¹³ Sw. “oupplöslig enhet.”

¹⁴ The two-parent breadwinner family was an ideal from the outset. However, the type of family model has never been of major interest in this discourse. This inclusive policy, uninterested in how actual families are organized, is probably an important aspect of how state preschool politics has been so successful in making preschool a concern for the majority of families and children in Sweden (cf. Lindgren & Söderlind, 2019). I will address how new arrival immigrant families are handled in this discourse.

¹⁵ “Den svenska invandringpolitiken har, till skillnad från en del andra länders, inriktat sig på att hjälpa invandrarna att hålla samman familjen.”

¹⁶ Sw. “familjeservice.”

¹⁷ Sw. “förskolebarndom.”

providing a basic and general education for all citizens (Hutt, 2017; Smeyers & Depaepe, 2008; Tröhler, 2017).¹⁸

While highlighting the educationalization process that Swedish preschools are undergoing, it also becomes important to briefly mention the historical context that allowed for the emergence of preschool (in its earlier variations) in Sweden. Kajsa Ohrlander (1992) underlines the importance of the solidary and moral discourse that appeared during the early decades of the twentieth century. Within this discourse, an image of “the child in need” was productive. This categorization included abandoned children, auctioned children, poor children, foster children who lived with old and ill foster parents in unhealthy-conditions, children who lived with alcoholic parents or with mentally ill and apathetic mothers, children who asked for help from charity organizations because of their violent and drunkard fathers, children who were neglected and who ran around and stole, children who were locked up with their siblings while their mothers worked and children who were blind or deaf and did not receive society’s assistance. In this category of children in need, the object of reference was always the other’s child. With the efforts to reform societal institutions, the child became a symbol for the future of the nation, and the struggle to save poor children was depicted as waging war for Sweden’s ethical salvation. In this “war,” empathy and mercy were crucial weapons for creating fundamental system changes through social reform, which included a discourse blaming parents.¹⁹

Ohrlander (1992) argues that the ideal of parenthood was under reconstruction, and teaching responsibility to parents was a way of changing the morals that were prevalent at the time, which allowed for child abandonment (bodily, mentally and financially). Such acts became criminalized and parenthood was formulated as a social mission to be performed by conforming to social rules and laws. Home became a public concern and parents were thought of as society’s agents in ensuring children’s upbringing and future.

With this new formulation of parenthood, poor working-class parents and children found themselves at the frontline of society’s struggle to control the premises of childhood as they were envisioned by the Swedish bourgeoisie. Precursor forms of preschool, such as kindergartens, were initially seen as a tool to assist working, socially vulnerable mothers and to redefine the child’s relationship with his/her outside world. They were “moral spaces” for binding the child to the wider community (Hultqvist, 1990).

¹⁸ Swedish preschool did not become part of the school system until 1996; before then, it was part of social work policy. The argument here is that preschool was already part of an educationalization process before it was formally labelled as education in the curriculum Lpfö18.

¹⁹ See Cunningham (1991) for similar developments in England, and Donzelot (1979) for details about France. Children’s own agency could also lead to interventions from society. For example children who earned their own money, went to the cinema and smoked could be regarded as without parental supervision and taken into care by a child welfare board, see for example Sundkvist (1994).

Hence, there is a tradition in Sweden of an active state intervening in children's upbringing and influencing parental authority and everyday life. This is reflected in the expansion of preschool (Lindgren & Söderlind, 2019). The fifty-year period of state preschool political discourse, investigated in chapter seven, has been a process of resolving society's need for a workforce in parallel with children's need for childcare and development. It has been entangled with discourses on lifelong learning—for adults and children—and as early as the 1970s there was a strong emphasis on the role that education ought to play in the development of preschool.²⁰ Education was seen as a prerequisite for adults to become parents, and for children education, alongside play, was assisting in the development of language and communication skills. In fact, the theories underlying education framed the concepts of development, communication and self-identity as closely linked together and as the basis for development through an education centered around dialogue (Lindgren, 2003a; 2003b; Lindgren & Söderlind, 2019).

Educationalization in the state preschool political discourse steered interest towards language and communication skills. In line with this, there was a focus on language development as a key factor for success in school and future prosperity for all children, which is emphasized in today's state preschool political discourse (SOU 1972:26 & 27; SOU 2020:67). As in the 1970s, today's discourse perceives the role of language development somewhat differently when addressing ethnic Swedes and immigrants, and I examine these differences in chapter seven.

Moreover, education is related to processes of nation building, to securing the reproduction of ideals related to the interests of nation states. In Sweden, preschool is part of the provisions made by the State for all its citizens, from the 1970s onwards, and the value of democracy has been highlighted since then as one of the key goals to strive for. However, today's ideal that preschool should be framed with a strong focus on education, and to a large extent be compulsory, was not yet an established truth in the 1970s. At that time, the idea that preschool should become compulsory was expressed in the public debate; however, it was an argument that was seriously questioned. Even though there was a lack of preschool services, the majority strove for alternative solutions, such as home daycare. The proponents of an expanded preschool who were active in the state preschool political discourse were explicit that preschool was voluntary, an offering that parents could turn down. Parents were regarded as the primary guardians of their children and to say otherwise was challenging and provoked resistance. Arguments for the right to preschool

²⁰ During the 1960s to the 1980s, there were also a large number of home-based childcare services run by women. However, in state preschool politics from the 1970s onwards, the institution has, with few exceptions, been the preferred solution. Today, that assumption is part of the dominant discourse (Lindgren & Söderlind 2019).

included the idea that preschool was voluntary (Lindgren 2003a; 2003b; Lindgren & Söderlind 2019).

Another aspect of how education is related to the interests of nation states concerns the question of how to treat immigrants, and this has been singled out throughout the period. There has been a tendency to reproduce, without reflection, an “everyday nationalism” in both preschool policy and practice (Björk-Willén, Gruber & Puskás 2013, p. 22; Åkerblom & Harju, 2019, p. 514).²¹ According to Polly Björk-Willén and Tunde Puskás (2013), this nationalism is due to the effects of notions introduced in the nation-state policy, where a majority is constituted in relation to minorities. When the concept “national minorities” was introduced into the preschool curriculum, a new type of minorities was created, which included immigrants and their children (Björk-Willén, Gruber & Puskás, 2013, p. 18).²² There could be several minorities, but the majority was always presented as singular and seldom defined, and the basic idea being reproduced was that one can only belong to one community.

Annika Åkerblom and Anne Harju show that “everyday nationalism” is reproduced in educators’ talk and the everyday routines of preschools, and is reflected in the images of children produced in preschool. They contend that:

The image of the rich and competent child, emphasized in Swedish policy documents and the national child centred pedagogy, does not apply to children constructed as the “other”. Instead, a controlled pedagogy aiming to compensate for something perceived as lacking in the children is legitimized. (Åkerblom & Harju, 2019, p. 514)

This is an example of how both preschool policy and practices reproduce notions of us and them, a majority versus a minority, implying differences in power and status.

According to Gruber and Puskás (2013), preschool has not been challenged to change its mission to become culturally diverse. Instead, preschool continues to reproduce the values expressed by the nation state and majority society. In this context, mastering several languages has become a marker for being Swedish or non-Swedish, and a child with many languages is defined as a child in need of special measures. In other contexts, mastering several languages has usually been considered an asset. However, in the preschool context, this was not the case. A child with several languages is a child with special needs, i.e. the need to master the Swedish language and their mother tongue. Hence, a stereotyped notion developed that related multiple language use to having low status in society (Gruber & Puskás, 2013).

²¹ Sw. “vardagsnationalism.”

²² Sw. “nationella minoriteter.” National minorities are Sami, Jews, Roma, Swedish Finns and Tornedalians.

In chapter seven, I will look into how the question of language has been dealt with in the state preschool political discourse. My analysis will complement the above-mentioned research. My analysis does not frame the question of how immigrants have been perceived in the state preschool political discourse in relation to theories about nation building, ethnicity and cultural diversity, as was the case in previous research. Instead, I use CDA as my guiding tool to study what was produced via the texts. In addition, I take the informants' writings about their perceptions of Swedish preschool as the starting point for my analysis.

Aim, Research Questions and Outline of the Thesis

This study is an empirically grounded discourse analysis about new arrivals and Swedish preschool. It presents two ways of dealing with the topic: new arrivals' thoughts on preschool and preschool's perception of immigrants. The empirical material produced to enable this phenomenon to be studied consists of texts written by new arrival parents themselves, i.e. their own writings about how they perceive preschool, and by the state apparatus for guiding and regulating the organization of preschool. The theoretical and methodological framework is critical discourse analysis, as conceptualized by Norman Fairclough (1992) in his early writings on the advantages of regarding discourse as a social event where agents, i.e. individuals, are both constituted by and constituters of discourse.

This critical theoretical approach promotes an understanding of language as both mirroring and constructing the world, including language as the expression, and creator, of agency and identity. The method employed for analysis was concerned with the themes that emerged from the two sets of data, which I regard as constituting a discursive event. Since new arrival families' own voices have not been included in previous research, these voices became a special concern for me, and were the starting point for my research process.

The aim of the study is to propose an understanding of how new arrival immigrant families perceive preschool and how such perceptions are, to some extent, related to the state preschool political discourse. I try to determine the ways in which the different texts produce overlapping discourses, as well as what is specific to each one, as a way to increase our understanding of new arrival immigrant families and preschool.

A general question initially guided the analysis: What were the major themes in the new arrivals' texts, and did they correspond with the state preschool political discourse? This broad question led to an unexpected cohesion in the answer: language learning. In both sets of data, language learning was a prevalent theme. This led me to search for nuances in the themes, which in turn led me to find similarities and differences internally in the respective sets of data, as well as when the data sets were brought into dialogue with each

other. In addition to language learning, the state preschool political discourse included two major themes about immigrants: as contributing to preschool and as in need of special measures.

The next step was to deepen my analysis of language as a tool for agency and identity. Firstly, I concentrated the analysis on how the informants wrote about language learning. How did they use references to language learning, and what did this produce? I posed the same question to the texts in the political discourse.

In the process of investigating language learning, I identified belonging as a prevalent theme in the new arrivals' writings and made that into a specific focus. The questions guiding me were: How did language become an expression of belonging, and what aspects of belonging did the parents address? How was belonging actualized in the state preschool political discourse?

In addition to the themed analysis, I also singled out linguistic features as important for studying how agency was constituted in the texts. I focused on pronouns/nouns, verbs and adverbs in order to determine how the informants positioned themselves, in relation both to preschool and to each other as family members, including their children. I also focused on how the state preschool political discourse positioned immigrant children and parents in relation to preschool and practitioners.

Hence, three sets of research questions guided the analysis of both sets of data, where themes were identified and studied by means of analyzing linguistic features. These three questions are answered somewhat differently in the three empirical chapters. Chapters five and six primarily concern the new arrival families' writings, and in these chapters I also bring their writings into dialogue with the state preschool political discourse with regard to the two questions about language learning and belonging. Chapter five is about learning language and chapter six provides a deeper understanding of the role of language in relation to aspects of belonging. When I bring the state preschool political discourse into these two chapters, I indirectly refer to the analysis presented in chapter seven. In this chapter, I focus exclusively on the state preschool political discourse. I present the major themes of learning language, immigrants as contributing to preschool and immigrants as in need of special measures. In addition, the analysis of how immigrant parents and children are positioned in relation to preschool and practitioners is presented in this chapter.

In chapter seven, when presenting quotes about state preschool political discourse, I use English instead of Swedish, and I decided to do the same in chapters five and six, where I use English instead of Arabic. The original Arabic and Swedish texts are provided in the footnotes. This makes it easier for the reader, and I treat the Arabic and Swedish languages in a similar manner. Furthermore, all quotations in chapters five and six are referred to by the name

of the informant who spoke them.²³ The quotations in chapter seven, on the other hand, lack such a personal representation and are given in numeral order: example 1, example 2, etc. The reason for this is that I met the individuals who provided the data for chapters five and six, while the writers behind the data that was used for chapter seven are anonymous to me, and what was said by them does not represent their individual experience.

In chapter eight, I discuss how the three questions can be answered in order to understand new arrival immigrant families and Swedish preschool as part of the same discursive event.

²³ The names used here are pseudonyms.

Chapter 2: Previous Research on Early Childhood Education and Care and Migration

Researching in the field of early childhood education and care (ECEC) is interesting but at times difficult; being a “young” discipline, it has not yet caught up with the wide range of challenges that preschool is facing in relation to meeting with new arrival immigrant families in Sweden. But, being a trans-disciplinary field, it offers insights from other research areas, such as migration studies. This chapter will provide an overview of previous research focusing on the meetings that take place between the preschool and new arrival immigrant families. When mapping out the existing research on the subject, I used terms and keywords such as: *new arrivals*, *Syrian refugees*, *preschool*, *migration*, *immigrant children* and *integration*, combined differently and in different languages (Swedish, English, French, Arabic, Spanish). By reviewing the relevant literature, I have positioned my thesis within a broader scientific context. This allows me to acquire an understanding of the existing problems within the field of ECEC studies in relation to migrant families, especially the newly arrived, as well as identifying how this study can make a contribution to the field.

It is noteworthy that the term “new arrivals” is not used in the literature to describe preschool children; it is only applied to older school children and adults. Therefore, it was necessary to include studies exploring immigrant and refugee children in a preschool context, which resulted in the research presented below.

Another insight was that the field of educational studies related to migration has been dominated by language learning and multilingualism. Hence, the focus tends to be on educational and pedagogical practices as a way to improve the children’s opportunities to learn and socialize (Skaremyr, 2014).

I will now present previous research and addressing the different ways in which preschool has been studied in relation to the themes found in my study: policy discourses, new arrival immigrant parents, language and belonging. I present my review under three subheadings: one concerning the role of preschool policy as a mediator of the ideals promoted by the host society, one about the role played by practitioners and new arrival parents when encountering preschool, and one about the role of knowledge and dialogue.

Preschool Policy: Super Mediator of the Host Society

Educational policies are crucial for the study of migration and integration (Messer, Schroeder & Wodak, 2012). Through policies and practices, teachers are socialized into a variety of discursive practices and ideologies (Gorski, 2011 as cited in Haugen, 2021). Preschools are places that are “neither politically nor culturally neutral” (Robinson and Jones Diaz 2016, as cited in Lamb, 2020: 130). Preschool is one of the first arenas in which new arrival families interact with the host society, and this means that the meeting between preschool practitioners and migrant families during this period is crucial. Research has shown that this meeting affects future partnerships between home and preschool (De Gioia, 2015; Vandebroek, Roets & Snoeck, 2009). ECEC, for refugee families who carry traumatic experiences, can provide a feeling of safety, and an environment in which the child is able to develop socio-emotional skills (Signorelli et al., 2017). At the same time, the essentialization of refugees can contribute to constructing a heroic narrative for the receiving countries rather than promoting democratic values and diversity (Gaywood et al., 2020). As stated in the introduction, preschool policy is related to a nation-state’s ambitions to address issues developing in the majority culture, i.e. the host society (Björk-Willén, Gruber & Puskás, 2013).

In Sweden, there has been special interest directed towards language in the nation-state’s ambitions and policymaking in relation to new arrival immigrants. This is seen in the perceived need for children to acquire both the majority language (Swedish) and their mother tongue (national minority languages or migrants’ languages). Policy texts during the 1970s and 1980s ascribed cultural diversity to migrants and their children, while Swedish culture is represented by the preschool. This reflects the power relations that exist between minorities and mainstream society, often illustrated by the underlying oppositions and conflicts at an individual level between preschool and home, as well as between parents and their children. Thus, exploring this question exposes the difficulties inherent in directing the spotlight towards preschool, because it becomes difficult to question the institutional role of preschool as a representative of mainstream society and a bearer of Swedish culture (Gruber & Puskás, 2013).

Moreover, the multicultural preschool has been described as different from Swedish preschool in general. This led to policymakers explaining the behaviors of migrants and their children in terms of cultural difference instead of focusing on creating equal premises and opportunities for children and their families (Gruber & Puskás, 2013). There has been a process of culturalization of social aspects in the policies. This means that different processes and conditions, such as segregation and poverty, risk being understood as cultural differences, rather than a preschool’s inability to meet its goals. The responsibility for fixing the problem becomes the responsibility of migrants, rather than of preschool and the politics guiding it (Gruber & Puskás, 2013).

In addition, since the end of the 1970s, Swedish policy documents have become vaguer in terms of formulating common guidelines for preschools on how to deal with ethnic and linguistic diversity. It is up to each preschool to individually address and work with diversity, including language learning, as in Swedish and the mother tongue. This makes it difficult to determine how a policy is being implemented in local preschools, where the practitioners' individual interpretations, choices and ways of setting priorities become decisive (Gruber & Puskás, 2013).

Even though cultural diversity is mentioned in the policy guiding Swedish preschool, it is not clearly defined or outlined in the preschool curriculum; it could be interpreted, for example, as multiple ways of living. The way in which it is formulated runs counter to preschool's role as a representative and reproducer of the nation state. Preschool practitioners thus work towards executing an aim that is simultaneously both culturally diverse and culturally homogenous, and this contradiction is experienced as challenging by practitioners (Runfors, 2013; see also Björk-Willén, Gruber & Puskás, 2013). Preschool's dual mission, as articulated in policy documents, with regard to stimulating both Swedish language and mother tongue learning for example, is perceived by practitioners as a cause of uncertainty and dilemma. Multilingualism in preschool, and the efforts made to stimulate it, rarely stop at just language issues. It touches upon other aspects as well, such as Swedishness, meetings between cultures and parents' literacy (Fredriksson & Lindgren Eneflo, 2019). A Finnish study has demonstrated that, in a bilingual preschool, language awareness occurs more spontaneously in relation to the Swedish/Finnish language pair, and less spontaneously when it is about developing other languages/multilingualism (Sopanen, 2019).

Reimers (2021) argues that the static view of cultural heritage as it is described in the preschool curriculum is a strong marker of national and ethnic identity. This can have negative effects on preschool practices, as it marginalizes children with cultural backgrounds other than that of ethnic Swedes, and makes them look strange and different. Reimers (2021) maintains that different cultures ought to be visible and included in the heritage that is said to be being transformed. She suggests the use of cultural heritagging (Sw. kulturarvandet) as a substitute term, being more inclusive of the cultural diversity that also exists in preschool practices. Heritage, according to Millei (2020), is found to be more related to the interplay of materiality with daily practices and less related to beliefs and ideologies. The nation is reproduced through children's and practitioners' performance of daily practices.

Harju and Åkerblom (2020) argue in their study that, although multicultural and multilingual approaches are promoted in the national curriculum for preschool, the daily linguistic practices in Swedish preschool reflect a different reality, in which monolingualism and monoculturalism prevail as the norm. The clash or mismatch between these different discourses in the preschool

context makes it difficult for teachers to deal with children with migrant backgrounds, which in turn has produced a dominant discourse of deficit. Åkerblom and Harju (2019), in a study about migrant children in Swedish preschool, claim that there is a discrepancy between what is promoted in the preschool curriculum and the linguistic practices played out in everyday practices. Practices that emphasize Swedish culture and language are given priority in preschool, constituting it as a primary mediator of mainstream culture and language. This leads to the use of controlled pedagogy to compensate for the lack of Swedish language competence in the “other” child, whereas the Swedish preschool child receives a different kind of pedagogy founded on the idea of a child who is rich in resources and competence. According to Åkerblom and Harju (2019), this means that the pedagogical approach to the immigrant child in preschool aims to compensate for the elements they are missing but the Swedish preschool child possesses; for instance, Swedish language competence.

A form of “everyday nationalism” is played out in preschool (see also Gruber & Puskás, 2013, about everyday nationalism). The conclusion is that, in Swedish preschools, a dual attitude towards diversity exists, seeing it as simultaneously both positive and problematic (Åkerblom & Harju, 2019). In the Swedish context, another study points out that the fear of conflict and a felt need to avoid confrontation are the main reasons for not addressing differences related to diversity in preschool (Anderstaf, Lecusay & Nilsson, 2021).

In the Finnish context, preschool is required to pay attention to the role of diversity in relation to religious values and worldviews. If assumptions and prejudices are not reflected upon by educators, then implementing the principle of equality, for instance, will not be possible (Kuusisto & Lamminmäki-Vartia, 2012). In Norway, a dominant discourse privileging the host society positions minorities as different and difficult. The Norwegian education system lacks knowledge about how to deal with aspects such as multicultural pedagogy or how to handle cultural differences in a productive and meaningful way. Studies are being conducted, but are not yet concluded, to determine how preschool staff can recognize refugee parents as important stakeholders (Sønsthagen, 2020). Furthermore, a closer look at the Norwegian, Swedish and Finnish curricula for preschool shows that the diversity of worldviews and religions that exist in these societies is reflected in these documents, which assert democratic values as the foundation for all interactions in preschool. However, the practitioners are granted freedom to interpret the content of these policy documents, which redirects the researcher to again stress the importance of the practitioners’ self-reflexivity in relation to national and personal values (Kuusisto et al., 2021).

The inability to address or handle cultural differences and diversity is identified as problematic in several studies, particularly since this inability creates

challenges in finding common ground for preschool practitioners and new arrival families (De Gioia, 2013; Garvis, 2021; Gruber & Puskás, 2013; Tobin, 2020; Van Laere, Van Houtte, & Vandenbroeck, 2018). Transitions within the education system tend to favor children from the majority society whose parents know how to navigate the system. Practitioners should be made aware that, for some refugee parents, ECEC is a total novelty. This means that they have to cope with a complete change in expectations and not knowing how to navigate in relation to preschool. Meeting preschool for the first time has an impact on the children's self-confidence and the parents' emotional response to finding their children in a new environment (Lazzari et al., 2020).

How language skills are defined and what is included in the concept of language skills is also important for how children are treated in preschool. Children at risk of social exclusion and who are associated with poor language skills have been shown to experience less teacher–child interaction during their time at preschool. Practitioners are more concerned with getting the children accustomed to structure and routines than to ensure that they are “engaging in meaningful interactions with teacher and with peers” (Peleman et al., 2020, p. 37). According to the practitioners, what are perceived as poor language skills make the children less assertive. This leads to them receiving less attention from practitioners, who rather tend to gravitate towards the children with more developed language skills. In this context, mastery of the language represented by the host society counted as language skills. Knowledge of a different mother tongue was not valued as language skills at all (Peleman et al., 2020).

The concept of belonging is relevant to this present study, since it is made relevant by my informants' writings. However, *belonging* as a concept is only rarely used in several European preschool curricula (Piškur, et al., 2021). Instead, it is promoted indirectly through everyday activities that strengthen democratic values and the child's self-confidence and independence. In my research, *belonging* is found only twice in the latest curriculum for Swedish preschool,²⁴ while *participation* and *support* were more frequently used. According to Piškur et al. (2021), however, the former is considered to be a prerequisite for *belonging*. Tünde Puskás (2016) has used *belonging* when looking at how the preschool curriculum is translated into practitioners' everyday work. Belonging is regarded as fundamental in the preschool national curriculum for enhancing a child's learning and strengthening democratic values by allowing the children's families to influence and become involved in their children's education (Puskás, 2016; Piškur et al., 2021) concludes. Zsuzsa Millei (2020) has examined how everyday nationalism is intertwined with children's institutional lives. She argues for the importance of studying objects and practices that reproduce the nation and which are often not so apparent as everyday nationalism, such as play, and what she calls embodied practices like

²⁴ Piškur et al. (2021) examined the earlier curriculum, 1998, and “belonging” was not found.

dressing, eating and celebrations. Everyday nationalism is reproduced in and shaped by daily activities, pedagogy and the curriculum itself, and it constantly adapts to the world's current socio-political and economic conditions (Millei, 2018; 2020). This was confirmed by Puskás and Andersson (2021), who studied how the celebration of Easter as part of Swedish cultural heritage is transferred to children in the preschool context. They found that preschool practitioners use the purposes stated in the curriculum, as well as extracurricular aims more related to daily practices, when exploiting traditions. They use old elements that represent continuity and, to some extent, incorporate new elements that represent change. According to Puskás and Andersson (2021), preschool practitioners become agents of change who challenge the predominant national discourse about Swedish Christian and secular heritage into which children are being socialized.

In Puskás study (2016), the use of belonging is limited to two different meanings: belonging as “identification with a particular ethnic or national community one shares an affinity with, without ever meeting all of the community's members” and as “inclusion in a group and attachment to individuals with whom one gets into close and regular contacts with” (Puskás 2016, p. 31). She argues that preschool practitioners are faced with a challenge when attempting to foster a sense of belonging that includes everyone in the multicultural society of today. Eek-Karlsson and Emilson (2021) show that preschool practitioners in general lack both knowledge and skills about belonging, and understand it only as being part of the community. In their study, they found togetherness and the practitioners' adoption of a caring approach to be a way of creating a sense of belonging. The practitioners also underlined the importance of having a common language, which enhances communication. Therefore, teaching Swedish becomes a prerequisite for facilitating immigrant children's membership of the host society. This is relevant to this study, even though I will use the concept of belonging in a broader sense and connect it to an analysis of how linguistic features constitute agency.

A Norwegian study has examined the politics of belonging in a Norwegian preschool setting from the point of view of the practitioner (Berge & Johansson, 2021). It found that children's belonging in the preschools examined was located in belonging to the preschool community, belonging to the community of migrant families, belonging to the community of migrant children and belonging to faith communities (this result could be connected to the findings of Kuusisto et al. (2021) about the Norwegian ECEC curriculum, which features Christian heritage and values as fundamental, thus creating a religious awareness among practitioners). While facilitating children's belonging to the preschool community, a process of categorization and othering is simultaneously put into place, as a result of emphasizing value differences (Berge & Johansson, 2021; Tillett & Wong, 2018). Practitioners are constrained when confronted with such situations because they find it difficult to know how to proceed when faced with conflicting values (Berge and Johansson , 2021; Eek-

Karlsson & Emilson, 2021). Finnish practitioners find the task of identifying unarticulated forms of belonging and exclusion in the preschool setting to be challenging, and that they need to apply multiple forms of competence, requiring its conceptualization in various ways (Juutinen, 2018; Juutinen & Kess, 2019).

Puroila et al. (2021) examined preschool practitioners' interpretations of children's belonging in Sweden, Finland, Iceland, Norway and the Netherlands. Gender and age were primary parameters for categorizing people, while other elements that were used to determine children's belonging stressed ethnic and cultural differences as well as individual needs. The study shows that children were perceived from the perspective of difference, rather than similarity.

The ways in which belonging is constructed in these previous studies are relevant for this present study. However, these studies addressed the practitioners' views and perceptions, while my study is concerned with the parents' views.

In conclusion, it seems to be a common understanding in research that preschool is important as a mediator between new arrival immigrants and the host society. As this review shows, studies of preschool mainly highlight its inability to handle the challenges of including newly arrived immigrant families in the preschool. This is important for the understanding of state preschool policy on immigrants, which I analyze in chapter seven. As shown this far, language—as in learning Swedish and one's mother tongue—is considered relevant as an aspect of diversity in previous research, and I will follow up on that lead in the three empirical chapters, expanding on the theme of belonging in chapter six. I will now continue by addressing previous studies that have focused on preschool practitioners and parents.

Preschool Practitioners and Parents: Hesitation and Collaboration

In this section, I turn to research examining how power relations affect the relationship between preschool practitioners and immigrant families, as well as to research arguing for the positive potential of fostering sound relationships between preschool and immigrant parents.

As indicated above, preschool practitioners are often guided by perceptions and values that are applicable to parents from the majority, host society. This may be partly due to the fact that the preschool curriculum expects practitioners to work in accordance with the values and norms that are expressed in both school law and the preschool curriculum. These aims are understood as superior to the aim of enhancing diversity, and can lead practitioners to educate immigrant parents in accordance with the expectations of the host society

(Lunneblad, 2013; 2017; Sønsthagen, 2020; Runfors, 2013). Preschool practitioners who have not been able to actively reflect upon diversity and how to handle such issues, including questions of multiculturalism and difference, run the risk of interacting with immigrant parents in ways that solely support the values of the nation state and host society (Löthman & Puskás, 2021; Puskás, 2013; Björk-Willén, Gruber & Puskás, 2013; Björk-Willén, 2013). This also applies to the school context. As Rissanen (2022) explains, immigrant parents experience their encounter with teachers as a polite encounter, during which they are listened to, but in reality their opinions do not influence school culture and practices in any way. Rissanen²⁵ (2022) argues that immigrant parents' lack of participation in school activities and parent–teacher meetings is mainly due to feelings of shame and insecurity and a lack of knowledge about the educational system rather than, as in the stereotype, being due to a lack of interest in their children's education. Kurucz et al. (2020) found that, in Germany, preschool practitioners' perceptions of multiculturalism had a direct impact on how they perceived immigrant parents' engagement and partnership with the preschool. Preschool staff who had a positive mindset regarding cultural diversity had more positive perceptions of their partnership with immigrant parents.

Preschool practitioners, when interviewed about the strategies they use during preschool practices of receiving refugees, are shown to have an “ambivalent attitude toward the parents,” i.e. they are both self-critical and critical of the parents (Lunneblad, 2017). Furthermore, new arrival parents feel that their voices are not heard in the preschool settings, especially those living in communities that lack multicultural competence; i.e. places where immigration is a new phenomenon, and where practitioners do not possess the necessary qualifications for dealing with the challenges that can arise when working with refugees (Tobin, 2020). Immigrant parents hesitate to put forward their views and questions due to insufficient knowledge of the language and a lack of understanding of the educational system and culture in the host society. Partly, this is due to asymmetrical power relations between immigrants and preschool practitioners (Conus & Fahrni, 2019; Tobin, 2020; Vuorinen, 2020).

In a study about the role of conversation in the establishment of a partnership between practitioners and immigrant families, it has been shown that the adults' language skills play a role. When parents collect their children from preschool, in the preschool hall, different conversations occur depending on how well the parents have mastered the Swedish language. Differences in language proficiency are crucial for the kind of conversations that can take place;

²⁵ Rissanen (2022, p. 2) studies the parent–teacher relationship by analyzing the views of cultural brokers; i.e. “intermediaries who in various ways help to bridge the worlds of families and the school: they translate and interpret language, help parents to navigate the school system, serve as advocates of the parents, enlighten school staff about the cultures of the parents, etc.”

there is an asymmetrical relationship between conversations. When this asymmetry, constituted via differences in language skills, becomes pertinent, feelings of frustration and unsafety arise. These feelings can be evoked in both practitioners and parents. Nonetheless, the result is often to hinder the goals articulated in policy texts. It could also pose a potential risk for the child, since critical information might remain uncommunicated. The situations where power asymmetries are most disturbing are related to differences in language proficiency (Björk-Willén, 2013).

In the United States, practitioners feel that they are left to their own devices because they lack the necessary information and instructions for how to work with the children of new arrival immigrant families. This means that they often have to rely on guesswork to decide what is most suitable for these children (Hurley et al., 2011). Preschool directors, when recruiting practitioners who have ethnic backgrounds other than Swedish, in order to enhance diversity work in their preschools, also rely on guesswork when choosing these practitioners. When assessing their competence, they describe it as more accurately being a gut feeling (Gruber, 2013; Björk-Willén, 2013).

The Importance of Establishing and Maintaining Dialogue

I now turn to studies highlighting the importance of establishing and maintaining a dialogue between practitioners and immigrant families. A healthy dialogue that assists in mutual understanding can be a crucial component for drastically reducing the misunderstandings and expectation gaps that can negatively affect the situation of the child (Baghdasaryan, Lampa & Osman, 2021; Conus & Fahrni, 2019; De Gioia, 2013, 2015; Tobin, 2020; Vandekerckhove & Aarssen, 2019; Van Laere, Van Houtte & Vandebroek, 2018; Van Laere & Vandebroek, 2017).

According to preschool practitioners, collaboration with parents becomes a relevant component of successful preschool practice because it addresses trust and fear issues (Ljunggren, 2018). As shown, for example, when studying the negotiation process that takes place between some preschool practitioners and Somali mothers in Norway, and how it touches upon their sense of belonging and sharing, a functioning family–educator partnership is essential. It enables the provision of good care and education for children from linguistically and culturally different backgrounds within preschool settings (Sønsthagen, 2018). Professional training on these issues should not be considered as merely an emergency response to increased immigration occurring occasionally and unpredictably. Rather there is a call for more basic research in order to advance scientific knowledge regarding how preschool can embrace and include immigrant families' views (Silva, 2008; Silva et al., 2020).

Diversity is a vague concept, according to Haugen (2021), whose study shows that diversity makes visible discourses on individuals' needs in relation to learning, and omits discourses on aspects such as ethnicity and race. Teachers' and preschool practitioners' understanding of diversity directly affects their work with children, as well as the institutional practices that are based on how they make meaning out of diversity (Haugen, 2021).

On the one hand, there is a huge need for initial and ongoing training of ECEC practitioners that focuses on diversity. On the other hand, there is a shortage of empirical studies demonstrating practitioners' needs and competences in the skills required to receive and work with immigrant children and families (Aguiar et al., 2020; Pirard et al., 2015; Silva, 2011; Silva et al., 2020). In Norway, practitioners' widespread insensitivity to cultural differences led the authorities to ask for further training of all educational staff about issues related to diversity and multiculturalism (Sønsthagen, 2020). In Sweden, this measure had already been identified as necessary in the government commission's report published during the 1980s, which studied the language situation of immigrant children of preschool age. It was suggested that Swedish preschool practitioners should acquire multicultural competence that would enable them to deal with values and behaviors that are prevalent in other cultures (Gruber & Puskás, 2013). In the Finnish context, it has been pointed out that preschool practitioners must examine their own values and attitudes and be reflexive in order to develop sensitivity to diversity and the multiplicity of worldviews (Kuusisto & Lamminmäki-Vartia, 2012).

Another study, in Sweden, focuses on how preschool practitioners with little or no previous experience of diversity, in a rural area with little experience of immigrants before the Syrian war, reflect upon their own integration when encountering immigrants enrolled in their preschool (Löthman & Puskás, 2021). It was the research process that provided the opportunity to reflect, yet the results reveal the importance of including strategies promoting collective reflection among practitioners. Reflection changed the practitioners' views from thinking of immigrants as the other to becoming included in their own views on preschool. They incorporated "the newcomers' perspectives" into their own, and both views became part of the practitioners' reflections about what a Swedish preschool practice can be. Thanks to dialogical encounters, "the practitioners adopted a culturally reflexive stance regarding their own practices and values," indicating that "dialogical encounters between the practitioners and migrant families are possible" (Löthman & Puskás, 2021, p. 11). Being able to recognize that the host society can also be perceived as the other is a major asset when promoting "a two-way communication that leads to common ground" (Löthman & Puskás, 2021, p. 11).

In this present study, I add to knowledge about how parents understand and sometimes present the host society as the other. In that sense, it can be used to add to knowledge about how common ground can be constituted in relation to difference and diversity in the meeting between preschool practitioners and

new arrival immigrant families. As Haugen (2021) shows, a single concept such as diversity can include many discourses, some of which become more salient than others in the teachers'²⁶ views on the subject. Like Haugen (2021), the present study examines how meaning-making in educational practices is constructed via language, by tracing it at both the lexical and the grammatical level. I am also answering the call for more research about how new arrival immigrant children and their families are received and introduced into Swedish preschool, and I do so by tracing the language they use.

²⁶ I use the term teachers instead of practitioners here, because Haugens study was based on interviewing school-teachers.

Chapter 3:

Theoretical Frame and Methods

This chapter presents the theoretical frame that inspired the way in which I understand and approach the empirical data that was produced and considered in this study. I explain why the data is presented as texts that produce social practices in one discursive event, and the implications of this for how the two sets of data have been analyzed. It is in my description of the theory, and in particular the three-dimensional conceptualization of discourse in a discursive event, that I develop my way of understanding and using the theory.

I draw heavily upon Norman Fairclough's (1992) early work on how to perform discourse analysis. This includes the comprehension of language use in a social theory, which directs the researcher to focus on how texts, as language in use, are discursive events that can be analyzed in terms of content, relationships and identity. In *Discourse and Social Change*, Fairclough presents an in-depth argument about why and how we need a social theory of discourse analysis. He does so by combining theories and methods from linguistic analysis (for example, conversation analysis and ethnomethodology) and discourse analysis, with an interest in how structures that manifest in society work via ideology and politics. A key concern is to bring agency into the analysis: how discourse constitutes and produces agency via members' own orientations, as well as via social and political structures that are in a dialectical relationship.

A key argument in Fairclough's work is that linguistic theories did not pay enough attention to structure, and structurally oriented theories were not particularly interested in the force invested in the micropolitics of everyday language use. This could explain why sociolinguistics has become a vital field of research. Still, linguistic theories are primarily interested in speech acts, how language structures and encodes meaning. My aim is to bring together structure and wording. Fairclough describes the process of merging these different strands into one theory and method as an interdisciplinary endeavor. He uses Foucault's theories on power and society, Derrida's view that language uses people, Halliday's detailed linguistic text analysis, Garfinkel and Sack's conversation analysis and ethnomethodology, and the Gramscian concept of hegemony and negotiation, to mention just a few. I will not recap Fairclough's argument here, since his texts are available for the interested reader. The focus here is to show how I have been inspired by his theory and methods and how

I use them in the present study. In the following section, I focus on language in use, a three-dimensional conceptualization of discourse in a discursive event, wording, word meaning, context and thematization.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA): A Theory for Change

When positioning CDA theoretically, Fairclough affirms that social practices are moments of discourse and that all aspects of social life (cultural, economic, daily, political) are produced through practices. Semiosis is inherent to a social practice by being part of the social activity, by figuring in representations (of one's own and others' practices) and in positioning performances within a practice, which vary in accordance with the group composition. The way in which social practices are combined and entangled is constituted by, and constitutes, a social order, i.e. an order of discourse, which has a semiotic aspect. Semiosis entails "all forms of meaning making" (Fairclough, 2001, p. 122). Mainstream or dominant discourses are a result of the ways in which these practices are organized (Fairclough, 1992; 2001).

Fairclough uses the term discourse to underpin the theoretical understanding of language use as a form of social practice. This means that language articulates more than just an individual's personal beliefs and activities in a specific situation. Each individual articulates more than just their own personal experiences, they also give voice to the discursive practice in which they are embedded. Discourse is a mode of action by means of which people act upon the world, each other and themselves. Hence, there is a dialectical relationship between an individual's social practices and social structure: On the one hand, discourse is shaped and constrained by social structure in the widest sense and at all levels: by class and other social relations at a societal level, by the relations specific to particular institutions such as law or education, by systems of classification, by various norms and conventions of both a discursive and a non-discursive nature, and so forth. Specific discursive events vary in their structural determination according to the particular social domain or institutional framework in which they are generated. (Fairclough, 1992, p. 63)²⁷

The power accumulated in norms and conventions is partly due to the fact that they are perceived as natural. In discursive events, norms and conventions

²⁷ As this quotation shows, Fairclough regards the non-discursive as also constitutive of identity and in contrast to, for example, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, he does not propose that language is the only way to produce reality, even though he is proposing that language use should be studied in order to understand its role in the formation of discourses that form reality (parallel with the non-discursive).

work to reproduce and transform their own conditioning structures in an ongoing process comprising the outcomes of past events as well as the conditions for current events (Fairclough, 1992, p. 89). The dialectical relationship between the effects of discursive practices on an individual, and the subject's agentic activity, depends upon social conditions and relations of domination, Fairclough argues (1992, p. 91). Thus, the norms and conventions conditioning the state preschool political discursive practice are inherently powerful. To some extent, these discursive practices frame the structure within which the new arrival immigrant parent puts his/her agency into practice.

In this present study, the state preschool political discourse is understood as a discourse that frames social relations at a societal level and via political institutions, as well as preschool as a societal institution. The articulations in the state preschool political discourse are thus socially constitutive as either constraining or enabling, and which they are depends on the individual's place in the system of classification and norms. The informants' writings do not have the status or power of being official articulations authorized by a political system. Fairclough describes political practice as a "superordinate category" and as both a site of power struggles and at stake in power struggles: "discursive practice draws upon conventions themselves, and the ways in which they are articulated, are a focus of struggle" (Fairclough, 1992, p. 67). However, theoretically, they are articulations shaped by and shaping social relations at a local and societal level, especially when voiced via research. Therefore, the dual aim of this study, with its two sets of data, complies theoretically with the understanding of discourse as "a practice not just of representing the world, but of signifying the world, constituting and constructing the world in meaning" (Fairclough, 1992, p. 64).²⁸ Both sets of data consider producing texts as an "articulatory" process constituting discourses (Fairclough, 1992, p. 9).

In this study, the texts produced in the political arena—by civil servants, politicians, experts (including researchers) and sometimes professionals—are analyzed to seek intertextuality, i.e. to see how the texts in the state preschool political discourse articulate and rearticulate each other over the course of a fifty-year period.²⁹ In analyzing the data, I have been interested in finding the shifts in discourses, relationships and boundaries over time and the ideas that are rearticulated by the new arrival immigrant families in their writings.

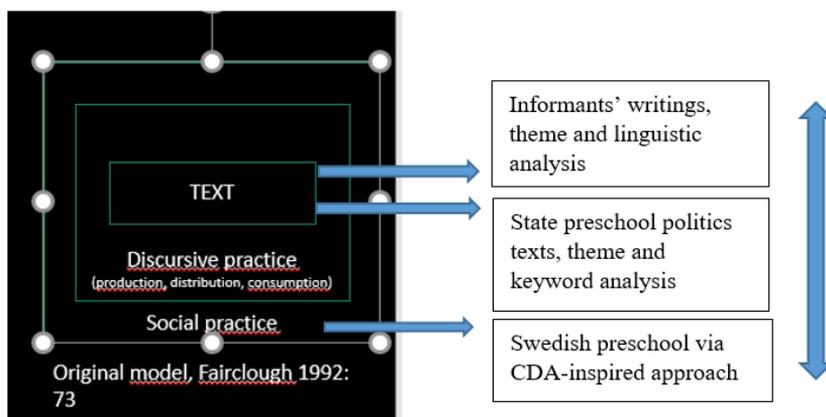
²⁸ "By 'practice' I mean real instances of people doing or saying or writing things" (Fairclough, 1992, p. 57).

²⁹ "Changing discourse practices contribute to change in knowledge (including beliefs and common sense), social relations and social identities; and one needs a conception of discourse and method of analysis which attends to the interplay of these three" (Fairclough, 1992, p. 8).

My Interpretation and Use of A Discursive Event in a Three-Dimensional Model

As the above might reveal, I have been inspired by Fairclough's three-dimensional conception of discourse in a discursive event when designing this study. He presents his conceptualization in a model that describes the three dimensions as text, discursive practice and social practice (Fairclough, 1992, p. 73, 1995, p. 135, see Figure 1). They are in a dialectical relationship and thus all three dimensions share traits with each other. Hence, text is also a discursive and a social practice, and discursive practice is also text and social practice and so forth. I interpret the model as a theory highlighting how discourse analysis aims to analyze language situated in practice, working somewhat differently in the three dimensions (as described above about social structure and individual agency). More importantly, I choose to regard the aim of this study as feasible to achieve via this model. Even though the texts, i.e. language, that I analyze belong to different genres, they are still related discursive practices within a discursive event. The texts that I analyze have different origins and are in different languages, but they are still texts and part of the same discursive event, framing a discourse about new arrival immigrants and Swedish preschool. I situate the texts from the political discourse and the informants' own writings as text in the model, as demonstrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: How I translate Fairclough's three-dimensional model of discourse in a discursive event in relation to my data and analytical methods



Theoretically, and as I interpret the model in Figure 1, while the new arrivals' writings shape their own texts, these texts are also shaped by the discursive and social practice of which they are part, as well as shaping them. In addition, the state preschool political discourse is shaped by the presence of new arrival

immigrants as well as by processes of the discursive practice of which they are part, as they also shape them. Fairclough distinguishes between micro-processes, relating to how participants produce and interpret texts on the basis of their members' resources, and macro-processes, showing "the nature of the members' resources (including orders of discourse) that is being drawn upon in order to produce and interpret texts, and whether it is being drawn upon in normative and creative ways" (Fairclough, 1992, pp. 85–86). A combination of these levels of analysis is preferred, according to Fairclough, who also provides a complex and extensive toolbox of methods for performing the analysis. Linguistic categories such as pronouns and verbs are central in CDA analysis because they are connectives constituting the social world via relational and action processes (Fairclough, 1992, pp. 176, 178). A verb marks a relationship between participants (as in having, being etc.) and/or indicates an action, i.e. points out "where an agent acts upon a goal" (Fairclough, 1992, p. 178).

When studying agency through textual analysis, Fairclough shows that there exist multiple ways of representing social actors (agents). He explains that social actors are normally participants in clauses but, at the same time, not all participants are social actors. By participants, Fairclough (1992, p.178) means "elements in clauses." The arrangement of these elements in a given clause is a matter of choice, which reflects the ideational meaning of the clause, i.e. how it represents reality (Fairclough, 1992, p. 27). Fairclough (2003) enumerates different variables that are used for the representation of social actors. The variables I focus on, and which are relevant to this study, are: pronouns/nouns, active/passive verb forms (whether the social actor via verbal choice is the Actor, the Affected or the Beneficiary), personal/impersonal, named/classified and specific/generic representations of social actors. Verbs are "linguistic devices used to express actions and agency" (Formanowicz et al., 2017, p. 567). Verbs, according to Fairclough, are demonstrative of the relationships that exist "between participant, and 'action' processes, where an agent acts upon a goal" (Fairclough, 1992, p. 178).

The choice of pronouns offers insight into how inclusiveness and exclusiveness are constructed in a text. The parameters that are used for social actor representation are of great importance for the study of agency and the construction of identities in discourses. Pronouns are an important indicator of agency and they connect language to contexts (De Fina, 2003). *I* and *we*, for example, can be used by the same person as a way to shift positions and embody an individual and/or collective identity, as shown by De Fina (2003). First-person pronouns, such as *me* and *I*, immediately center the attention on the self (Formanowicz et al., 2017). Hart (2015) argues that positioning in language can be either semantic or pragmatic. It is semantic when meaning is determined by certain grammatical constructions, and pragmatic when it is defined by "the context of utterance and background assumptions" (p. 241).

A pragmatic approach could focus, for instance, on pronominal alterations applied by the speaker to navigate through multiple identities and positions in interactional contexts (De Fina, 2003).

In the analysis of the new arrivals' writings, I have focused on such linguistic features and parameters as a way to investigate agency, which I explain below in the section on CDA as method. My analysis of the informants' writings is oriented towards both form and content, while the analysis of the political texts focuses more on content than form. Hence, the analysis of the state preschool political discourse is of a different character than that of the informants' writings, since the former is focused on a key-word analysis to detect what themes are in play, in order to "give insights to commonsense assumptions about the social order, and rhetorical strategies" as a way to gain an understanding of how the state preschool political discourse perceives new arrival immigrants (Fairclough, 1992, p. 183).

Word meaning and wording are about constituting meaning via the use of language via "word meaning potential" related to the situational context where they are used. In other words, "words and meanings are implicated in processes of social and cultural contestation and change," since "meaning potentials are unstable" (Fairclough, 1992, p. 186). Thus, the terms used, i.e. vocabulary/wording, create different realities and experiences, according to Fairclough. He uses the wording relating to immigration as an example; to word immigration as an "influx", a "flood" or a "quest for a new life" constitutes different realities and experiences. How to use a word and how to word meaning opens up space for choices in both the production and interpretation of the word's meaning, including the value that should be placed on it. These choices and decisions *are not*, however, "of a purely individual nature: the meanings of words and the wording of meanings are matters which are socially variable and socially contested, and facets of wider social and cultural processes" (Fairclough, 1992, p. 185). Hence, meaning-making is both an individual and a collective process, and the one might affect the other in multiple ways.

This is another example of how Fairclough attributes agency to ordinary people in the ways in which they interpret and use language, in a dialectical relationship with structures and context. However, he is also referring to situations where the meaning potential becomes less unstable, where it is more taken for granted or produces dominance. That is, when there is a "hegemonic model of word meaning" reducing potential and hence resistance and change (Fairclough, 1992, p. 190). The "objects referred to in discourse," via wordings, might ignore both the existence of and resistance to an experience (Fairclough, 1992, p. 191). In a similar way, certain "culturally salient keywords" are part of the power struggles around meaning making.

Wording and word meaning are also part of how intertextuality is produced and consumed. The choice of vocabulary, when wording experience, constitutes "a particular configuration of intertextual elements in producing a text," according to Fairclough (1992, p. 191). "Language" as in "learning language,"

or even “learning the Swedish language,” are examples of wording as intertextual elements, which are used in the state preschool political discourse and in the writings of the informants. I will show how wordings are in a dialectical relationship even though they also constitute, and configure, different experiences (see chapter seven).

In CDA methodology, context is crucial for understanding the meaning of a problem. As explained in the introduction above, a CDA approach encourages the researcher to define research in relation to a relevant problem, what Fairclough refers to as a “situational context” or “the context of situation” to “explicate the context-text-meaning relationship” (Fairclough, 1992, pp. 47, 81–82). In order to grasp the meaning of a text’s content via wording and the use of grammatical elements such as verbs or statements, and how they are interrelated, the situational context is important. The social identities of participants (for example, gender and ethnicity) also affect the reading of a situation, and hence the interpretation (and production) of a discursive event. According to Fairclough, the interpretation of texts also varies in relation to discourse type (Fairclough, 1992, pp. 47, 83). In this present study, there are potentially several social problems with political components that can be identified as relevant to the situational context; for example, the Syrian war forcing hundreds of thousands of people to become refugees, the Swedish welfare system “collapsing” and stopping refugees at the borders, the Swedish preschool facing novel challenges as it seeks to integrate new arrival families and their children.

These examples all give voice to an inherently Swedish perspective on the potential problems caused by an increase in the number of new arrival immigrants. This is why I choose to use the state preschool political discourse as a way to contextualize the texts produced by the new arrival families, who bring with them other, new, points of views on Swedish society, which defines them as new arrivals. Preschool politics is an essential part of the social context encountered by the new arrival families with children in their everyday lives. It is part of the external context of their texts, at the same time as it is a context they cannot ignore, and hence preschool politics is part of the social production and situational context of their writings as a form of social practice. The state preschool political discourse is part of the context within which the new arrival families’ texts are produced. The texts in the state preschool political discourse are also of a different discourse type than the informants’ texts, as I have pointed out, and I also make use of this in the analysis.

Being part of a research study is also to be part of a social practice, even though I do not make that a focus of the analysis in the empirical chapters. Describing and reflecting upon how the research is conducted serves to explain this part of the research’s discursive event. It could also be argued that the pre-refugee and refugee experience are also important contextual aspects of the practice of the new arrivals’ writings. For several reasons, and as explained above, in this present study this aspect is not included. In sum, there

are (at least) three contextual aspects forming the discursive event that frames the writings of the new arrival immigrant families in this present study: 1) The country and culture of Syria, where they came from, including war, flight and migration; 2) The new country they arrived in, with its preschool politics; and 3) Taking part in a research project. It is mainly the second aspect that I choose to focus on in the analysis.

Fairclough states that “texts as elements of social events have causal effects—i.e. they bring about changes” (Fairclough, 2003, p. 8). These changes have both immediate and long-term causal effects; immediate ones that bring about changes in our knowledge, and long-term ones that result in changing identities, policies, systems etc. Thus, the key elements of CDA that are important for this study include the theoretical understanding that language in use is social and constitutive, and that language is an individual resource in dialectical relationship with structure, entailing the potential to produce change (and continuity). This is the substance of the present study and defines its usefulness to the participants, giving them the position of being agents and actors who are helping society to increase and develop its knowledge base, and at the same time taking part in and influencing current research and policies on new arrival immigrants and preschool. In the next section, I present the methods used in the data analysis.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA): A Method for Analysis

Methodologically, CDA includes many methods borrowed from various disciplines: political science, psychology, sociology, linguistics and ethnology. An analytical framework for CDA analysis provides the opportunity to conduct, for example, structural analysis, interactional analysis, linguistic analysis, content analysis, themed analysis, key-word analysis and interdiscursive analysis of the examined discourse itself. I have turned to various different sets of tools to analyze the data produced in this study. The state preschool political discourse is a key-word-driven themed analysis, and the new arrival families’ writings have been analyzed with the help of different linguistic tools, including theme-oriented structural analysis based on coding and categorizations.

Data Processing and Analysis Stages: Letting the New Arrival Families’ Writings Inspire me in Choosing the Analytical Method

Below, I describe how I performed the analysis of the parents’ writings. I give a step-by-step presentation, showing the different stages of the analysis. The

steps cover the initial process of translating the texts, how I worked with thematizations and the textual analysis. Finally, I present examples of the analysis for chapters five and six.

Step One: Translation

In order to present my analysis in English, I started to translate the new arrival parents' writings. Translating the texts was quite smooth, so I decided to make two translations of each text, one literal and one in idiomatic English. The literal translation helped me to notice some characteristics that I was blinded to when I read the Arabic originals; for example, the use of verbs. Then, the idiomatic translation helped me to formulate the ideas expressed in the texts; for example, themes on the role of hygiene and cleanliness and cultural values regarding aspects such as respect for teachers and the elderly. The main analysis was nevertheless conducted on the original Arabic texts, not on the translations. In analyzing the Arabic texts, peculiarities of the Arabic language that are relevant to the present study were considered, and this helped me to understand the texts in a more nuanced way during the analytical process. For example, I needed to pursue the linguistic analysis in Arabic because the use of pronouns differs in English and Arabic, and in order to stay with the informants' expressions and voices it became essential to continue the analysis in their own language.

Step Two: Thematization

After reading the texts and becoming familiarized with them, I tried to find themes that would help me to organize the analysis process. However, organizing the texts in one way or another was not yielding any results, so I decided to treat each text as an independent unit, determining what was typical about it. I marked all the parts of each text that were linguistically salient. This step was inspired by Fairclough's recommendations on what to look for when analyzing discourse as a text. The researcher is recommended to work on certain features of the text that help in understanding the context of its production and possibilities for its interpretation; these features are: vocabulary, grammar, cohesion, text structure, force, coherence and intertextuality (Fairclough, 1992). When reading and rereading the informants' texts, it became apparent that grammar appeared to be an important tool/theme for the analysis. The informants' similar choices of verbal, adverbial and pronominal use clarified their relationships to themselves and to others. Many themes became apparent, such as being a parent in Syria/Sweden, being a child in Syria/Sweden, being an Arab, having to learn a new language, being confronted with a new system, racism, awareness of school segregation and the benefits and obstacles of learning the new language.

Analyzing discourse implies looking into the process of its production, distribution and consumption. Here, it is important to ask who is the producer of

the text. In the case of my informants, they are both “authors”—i.e. the composers of the words in the texts—and “principals”—i.e. the ones who are represented by the words used in the text. In contrast, in the case of the preschool state political discourse, the author and principal positions are occupied by two different groups. Here also, the consumption of these two types of texts are different; while the informants’ texts are consumed by just a few researchers and transformed into a research study, the other corpus is consumed by state officials, preschool practitioners, researchers and politicians, and is transformed into law or recommendations.

Fairclough (1992) argues that there is a socio-cognitive dimension to the process of text production and interpretation. By this, he means that the discourse that participants bring into these processes provides traces and cues of internalized resources which reflect the existing social structures. Thus, by means of a discursive practice analysis, one is able to uncover social structures as both a cause and an effect of a social practice. This involves both a micro and a macro analysis and reveals the dialectical relationship that exists between the dimensions. In order to conduct a micro-analysis and understand the participants’ ways of producing a text and interpreting it, a macro-level analysis reveals the existing social structures and order of discourse that are being used by the participants to produce their texts. Micro and macro analyses thus clarify the dialectical relationship between the parents’ texts and the state preschool political discourse.

Step Three: More Thematization

I then returned to the texts anew, this time with a focus on vocabulary. I decided to determine what were the most frequently recurring themes (again!) in the informants’ writings. I commenced a thematized content analysis and adopted an inductive approach to the informants’ texts, allowing this data to determine the themes that I then used to organize my analysis within the three-dimensional framework presented by Fairclough (see figure 1). I also chose a semantic approach, which means analyzing (mainly) what is explicitly articulated by the informants. This process involved transcribing the informants’ texts onto my computer and then dividing them into sentences. Most of the texts lacked punctuation, which means that a sentence could begin and end anywhere. It also gave the impression that the informants wanted to pour out all their concerns and views onto the paper without any dots or commas restricting them. In order to create meaning in their texts, I had to read them out loud to myself to determine the end of each sentence.

Once the texts were divided into sentences, I started coding them. The codes I used represented the general meaning of each sentence; for example, ³⁰بيلادنا لا يوجد رياض أطفال إلا خاص was given the code *preschool in Syria*. Another

³⁰ Eng. “In our country, there are no preschools except for private ones.”

example: ولادي طولوا لحتى تأقلموا على جو الروضة³¹ was coded as *time taken to adapt to preschool*. These codes were further classified into categories, and some were included in more than one category. The first example was categorized both as *preschool privilege* and as *parents' perceptions of Syrian preschools*, while the second example was categorized both as *adaptation* and *time* but could easily have also been categorized as *children's experiences of preschool*. Here, the process of interpretation mentioned above reveals the cues of internalized social structures, which means that several readings of the same texts are possible. My choice of these categories is based on my reading of what seems to be important to the informant when considering these sentences in relation to the text as a whole.

Let me argue further for my position. In the second example, the informant uses the verb *طولوا* which literally means *it took them a long time*. A variant of this sentence where time is not emphasized could be, for example, *my children didn't adapt immediately*. I understand defining themes in content analysis to be different from thematization as proposed by Fairclough (1992). In the former, themes are a paraphrasing or a conclusion of a sentence from the perspective of the text's interpreter, while in the latter they are "the initial part of the clause," reflecting the perspective of the text's producer of what is considered to be known by him/her and by the interpreter (Fairclough, 1992, p. 183). This approach to thematization would be more suitable for the purpose of this study and more in line with CDA, but it is difficult to conduct due to structural differences between the languages. If I were to thematize the first example above, the theme would emphasize the lack of preschools in Syria, rather than describing in general terms the situation of preschool in Syria. Furthermore, focusing on the words, rather than the ideas they express, makes detecting theme-frequency more difficult. Instead, I focus on ideas when performing the themed analysis. Still, both approaches try to reflect the informational content of the clause/sentence.

Themes that I found relevant to my study were those that the informants used to express agency and resistance, which can generate a deeper understanding of the social practice being examined. The selected themes in the informants' texts are also connected—to some extent—with the preschool state political discourse, which will be analyzed in chapter seven.

Step Four: Textual Analysis

Once the themes were identified, I began the textual analysis, looking at linguistic features, such as deixis, verbs and pronouns.

In the analysis of the new arrival families' writings, I pursue the Faircloughian tradition and work towards finding linguistic expressions of dominance and resistance to dominance, via deixis and pronouns. I do this by conducting a structural analysis of both the context and the text, to determine the

³¹ Eng. "It took my children a long time to adapt to the preschool's atmosphere."

prevalent discourses, content and topics. I then proceed to interactional analysis and focus on linguistic concepts and devices that are relevant to answering my research questions (Weninger, 2008). These linguistic devices, or parameters, are mainly employed from a representational perspective which, according to Fairclough (2003), means analyzing a clause with a focus on three elements. These are: processes (verbs), participants (subject/object) and circumstance (adverbs of, for example, time and space). This perspective is crucial for identifying social actor representation and agency. Through my focus on the verbs, I demonstrate whether the representation of social actors is active or passive. Through pronouns, I demonstrate whether social actors are included or excluded, clarify the function they are assigned and whether they are represented personally or impersonally or in terms of name, class or category. Finally, I use an analysis of interdiscursivity as a way to identify semi-otic resistance. However, I have adapted the analytical tools to the qualities in the written texts, and I describe my methods of analyzing in this section.

Examples of the analysis

In chapter five, I examine the verbs used by my informants and the adjectives they apply to describe themselves and their children. In this way, I identify agency, emotions and other concerns the parents describe as essential in their perceptions of preschool. This method is in line with the CDA approach, where a linguistic analysis at a micro level reveals the informants' agency. I started by identifying recurring general themes. For example, when an informant wrote: "her linguistic development was excellent," I coded this as "language development," categorized it as "language skills" and thematized it as "language," which was one of the most prevalent themes.

Once this was done, I turned to an interactional analysis with a focus on two linguistic features: verbs and adjectives, which were used to write about language development and language skills. Such deictic elements are used as a way to contextualize lived experience and to express subjectivity (Greene, 1992). I refer to descriptive active verbs and interpretative active verbs, where the former expresses actuality and activity while the latter expresses a more abstract perspective on action and is also less active. This shows that the informants used different verbs depending on how they related language acquisition to a timespan. The use of verbs initially positioned the children as passive recipients of Swedish, and then, as they advanced in their learning, they were described as active participants. In relation to Arabic, the children were always described as active. In addition, I studied the qualifiers that the informants used with their verbs, i.e. how they were related to adjectives. This showed that a majority of the informants were positive about their children's language acquisition in Swedish, while a smaller number expressed hopelessness because their children stopped talking when in preschool. In the concluding discussion, I relate the findings presented in the chapter to the state preschool political discourse.

In chapter six, I address the parents' perceptions of belonging as a way to make their agency visible. Belonging was singled out as an important theme because most informants wrote about their identities in relation to places and to others. I found categories such as time, emotional response, ethical values, exclusion and place to be present in the informants' writings about their relationship to places, to their children and to other people and things. Belonging can be used as an analytical tool that allows us to ask "to what" and "with whom" does a person belong, and language serves as a "linguistic force" linking belonging to physical and symbolic places, while also considering aspects of space and time (Anthias, 2018). I then applied linguistic analysis featuring the use of deictic place adverbs, thus highlighting how the speaker positions the self and describes their proximity and distance to the subject s/he is talking about (Brewer & Harris, 1974). This shows that the participants in this study constructed their writings—which included comparisons of their past and present experience, values and collective symbolism—around these specific linguistic devices; i.e. deictic place adverbs. These devices give a historical, geographical and cultural dimension to the informants' experiences of belonging to a certain place, or to their lack of belonging.

Furthermore, I looked for the adjectives they used to describe how they perceived their (both parents' and children's) relationship to the preschool. Such adjectives included, for example, comfortable, happy and excellent. I also looked into how the informants used pronouns to mark both individual and collective agency with regard to their parental role and family members. In the concluding discussion, I relate the findings in the chapter to the state preschool political discourse. Connecting my result to the state discourse is inspired by CDA's interest in showing how agency is manifested in and via texts and its approach to singling out the dialectical relationship between structure and agency, as described in the section on theory.

Analysis of the State Preschool Political Discourse

The analysis of the state preschool political discourse is based on a systematic review of policy texts published from the 1970s up until 2020. The texts included in the analysis are: the reports of three government-appointed commission, i.e. commissions of inquiry (Sw. SOU 1972, 1997, 2020), three government bills (Sw. Propositioner 1973, 1984/85, 1997/98), the first pedagogical program and the first preschool curriculum (Regeringskansliet 1998) with its revisions (Skolverket 2006, 2011, 2016) and the latest curriculum (Skolverket 2018). This selection covers both the content of the political argument and how it was intended to be translated into everyday preschool practices by the adoption of a preschool pedagogical program and the preschool curriculum. I have excluded government commissions' reports and bills that did not mention immigrants, or only mentioned them very briefly. I give an overview of the different texts and choices in the section on producing data in chapter four.

During the fifty-year period under review, the terms used to address and describe immigrant and newly arrived children have varied in the preschool policy texts. I have used the terms as they were presented in the political discourse, i.e. I followed the wordings in the original texts and the shifts in wording is part of the analysis presented in chapter seven. The first time that there was a *definition* of “new arrival children”³² in a government commission’s report was in 2020.

The analysis was performed by tracking the terms referring to immigrants in the Swedish language. I paid special attention to how the texts presented explanations for how immigration was affecting Swedish society. I also focused on how children, parents/guardians and practitioners were positioned in the texts, i.e. the ways in which they were given agency, or not, in relation to preschool. As shown in chapter seven, the texts mainly concern immigrant children and this has influenced my analysis—the majority of that chapter is about immigrant children. Since language was a key theme in my informants’ writings, I paid special attention to the language used in the state preschool political discourse. Hence, my informants’ writings were important for how I read the policy texts. An analysis of the state preschool political discourse situated in a different discursive event than the one I have identified might therefore have been different. When operationalizing the aim of the study, the informants’ writings were the starting point, as I have explained earlier in this thesis. If the informants’ writings had brought up other issues, this would probably have had different effects on my analysis of the state preschool political discourse.

In short, by following the wordings related to immigrant children and parents/guardians and practitioners, I tracked the emergence of a theme relating to how the immigrant was constructed in the political discourse. In addition, I traced the role that references to language played in the discourse. The focus on both wordings for immigrants and how language was used made me aware of two additional themes running through the documents. The first concerns the ways in which immigrants were seen as contributing to preschool. The second concerned the opposite—how immigrants were perceived as a category in need of special support. Hence, in chapter seven, I present my analysis of these three themes: the construction of the immigrant child and parent, the immigrant as an asset to preschool and the immigrant as in need of special support. I use several quotations in order to be transparent about the analysis process and, in order to retain this transparency, I present the original Swedish text in footnotes. Presenting the quotations is a way to open up the material and allow the reader to make alternative interpretations.

³² Sw. “nyanlända barn.”

I also want to be clear that I have not performed an analysis of how party politics or ideological affiliations have played out in the state preschool political discourse. That would indeed have been interesting; however, it is beyond the scope of this thesis.

For the analysis of both sets of data, I was guided by Fairclough's (1992) recommendation for performing discourse analysis, i.e., I focused on how the texts, as language in use, are discursive events that can be analyzed in terms of content, relationships and identity. This focus helped to extract the themes of my study: *language* as the main content of both sets of data, *belonging* as a way to present the main relationships concerning both parents and policymakers in the preschool context and *identity* as portrayed by the agency attributed to immigrant parents and children, by both the informants and the state preschool political discourse.

I do not claim that themes are discourses. The themes I have traced were more of an instrument that enabled me to enter the discursive event and analyze the data as discursive and social practices, as well as to identify discourses. Nonetheless, a question I explored during the analysis and writing process was: when do themes become discourses? I would say that themes are an expression of how a text is arranged lexically, but once agency and power relations are incorporated, themes become discourses; i.e., themes are neutral while discourses are loaded. This was a real challenge, however, because such an understanding of themes and discourses depends upon the reading one makes; neutrality in meaning is a subjective matter. Therefore, CDA was a suitable method for this study, because it extends beyond the linguistic and textual content and form of a text, to also include the context by showing how one shapes the other and is reshaped by it.

The CDA approach has provided me with the magnifying glass I needed for spotting power relations and normalized practices of inclusion and exclusion. Potentially, the themes I have identified could be described as parts of a variety of discourses about parenthood, childhood, immigration/integration or preschool. The interdisciplinary nature of this study makes it possible to relate these themes to all of the discourses mentioned above. This means that I present new insights in the field of ECEC, without restricting my findings to any specific discourse or discipline.

Chapter 4: Producing Two Sets of Data

This study is an empirically driven discourse analysis with a dual aim and two sets of data. One set of data consists of texts produced by new arrival families about how they perceive Swedish preschool. The second set consists of official texts setting out the political aims for Swedish preschool and new arrival immigrants. Finding data to study the state preschool political discourse as a social practice, which forms part of a discursive practice framing the informants' writings, was a fairly straightforward process since these texts are publicly available in digital form on the Internet, apart of the first preschool curriculum which I had to request from a public library. However, gathering the set of data analyzed in the study as a social practice, i.e. the writings of new arrival families about their perceptions of Swedish preschool, was anything but straightforward, as will be explained in the first section below, about the data production. This section addresses finding participants for the study and the obstacles involved in that process. I then describe how the participants produced their texts, the quality of those texts and ethical considerations.

The CDA approach does not consider data collection to be a separate step which has to end before analysis can start. Rather, the analysis may raise new questions that require further data collection as part of the research as an “ongoing practice,” during which the data undergoes “ongoing enhancement” (Fairclough, 1992, pp. 227, 228). This was true in this present study, since the data collection process was both lengthy and zigzagging. In addition, the need to identify a context for a related social practice to enable me to interpret my informants' writings was a result of new questions raised during the research process. The process taught me that, as Fairclough suggests, when defining or designing a project, social practice as reflected in texts ought to be identified in relation to social structures and the social context outside the text (Fairclough, 1992, p. 226; 2001). For my project, the social practice constituted by the texts produced in the public and political sphere made the structures outside my informants' writings visible.

Data Production Stage: New Arrivals' Writings

The Odyssey of Finding Participants

In short, the initial idea was to approach new arrival families who had been given residence in Sweden after fleeing the Syrian civil war and ask them to freely write a page and a half or two pages about their perceptions of Swedish preschool, in whatever language they chose, and from any perspective they wanted. In selecting the informants, three criteria guided the process: 1) that they belong to the category of new arrivals, i.e. their residence period in Sweden did not exceed four years; 2) they are Syrians, and 3) they have children enrolled in preschool.

My entrance to the field in 2017 was somewhat difficult for several reasons. Therefore, finding participants for the study was a protracted process; it took me two years to get texts from 19 informants. Many preschools were contacted, in both large cities and small municipalities. I asked the preschools if they had any children who could be described as belonging to new arrival Syrian families. I was first referred to the director of each preschool, because the staff claimed that they could not give out such sensitive information. Some directors said they had no such children, others said they were expecting a few in the coming weeks, and others simply did not want to collaborate because it was time-consuming and difficult to clearly explain my research project to the parents.

I decided to turn to a smaller town, although one that was on the front line in the reception of incoming refugees. After contacting several refugee reception centers there, I was finally introduced to my first participant, who helped me get in touch with two other women, given that she worked daily with new arrivals. I then made a long list of preschools in other smaller cities and on the outskirts of a larger one. The choice of these preschools followed the known pattern of housing segregation, so I avoided contacting preschools in which the probability of finding new arrival families was low. The phone conversations I had were often very short, because the heads of the preschools said they were extremely busy and had no time to let their practitioners participate in research studies, even though I explained that the study does not include any preschool staff. After a while, I decided that preschools might not be the best place for getting in touch with potential informants.

I then recalled a former colleague who had moved to a small town to work as an integration adviser for the municipality and was in touch with immigrants and refugees on a daily basis. I phoned him to explain my difficulty in finding participants for my study, and asked if he could help by putting me in touch with the Syrian refugees he works with. He and his assistant contacted several families and asked if they would be interested in participating in a research study. This resulted in a list of ten names, all men. They all said they

were willing to participate, and promised to allow their wives to take part as well, after which they would send me the requested texts.

Later, one early summer's day, my first participant called me to say there were a few preschools in her city where I might be able to find more participants. She gave me the name and details of the woman I should contact. I phoned this woman and explained what my study was all about. She was very enthusiastic and promised to help me. She advised me to come and visit the preschool. Two mothers were willing to take part in the study. By then, I had 15 participants, and needed five more to have enough material to start conducting my analysis. I still wanted to contact new arrival families in big cities. I started this time by phoning the National Agency for Education (Skolverket), and asking to speak to the person in charge of early childhood education. I was told to contact a reception center for new arrivals. I did this, and was again advised to call Skolverket. I drew up a new list of preschools in this big city, and this time I included not only preschools located in segregated areas, but also preschools in more prosperous neighborhoods of the city. This attempt was no more successful than the previous one.

Then, by chance, while reading the daily news, I came across an article about an old-age facility which had been converted into refugee housing. New arrival families were put there for a period of five years until they could find a permanent place to live. This led me to call the municipality again and talk to the person in charge of preschools in that specific district. I was told that, near this place, there was a preschool that exclusively received the children of new arrival families, most of whom were Syrians who lived in the same neighborhood. After speaking to the head of the preschool, I learned that it was due to close down in a few weeks, but that negotiations on the matter were still taking place with the decisionmakers. The head of this preschool was clearly very little interested in my project as she was focused on trying to ensure the survival of her preschool. Finally, she responded and told me to get in touch with the main teacher there.

The practitioner, herself a Syrian who had been living in Sweden for over two decades, asked me to come and visit her at the preschool. I went there the next day, where I sat down for coffee with her and her fellow workers. She also invited some mothers to stay on, as they were passing by to drop off their children. The atmosphere was very lively, and she told me about the challenges they were facing and why the political administrators had decided to close their preschool. Segregation was their main argument, she said. In this preschool, the children did not have to interact with native Swedish children. "But they're doing very well anyway!" she exclaimed.

After spending the day there, I was invited to the farewell party, which was due to be held in two weeks, because of the decision to close down the preschool. I went back and was introduced to the mothers, and I told them about my study. They were very enthusiastic and invited me to their homes to talk

more about the project. I took their phone numbers and promised to call them during the coming days.

Only one woman wanted to participate in the study, the rest declined saying that they were too busy, but I thought perhaps it was because they were unwilling to write down their opinions or because their husbands were opposed to the idea. I thought the housing facility might be my best chance, so I went back to the building and sat down near the entrance. I had printed my information letter in Arabic and handed out copies to the parents who came and went, but none seemed enthusiastic about making further contact.

The rest of my participants eventually came to me via other informants who had already sent me their texts. All in all, this finally resulted in texts from 19 informants located in different Swedish towns that differ in size and population density, as well as in their experience of receiving immigrants.

The Field's Gatekeepers: Obstacles and Points of Entry

As a result of this search to recruit informants, I found, unexpectedly, that the field of my study has its gatekeepers. The gatekeepers who were reluctant to give me access to the field were all native Swedes with Swedish names; we communicated in Swedish and they had high positions in the hierarchy of the preschool system (the only exception was the head of the preschool in the large city described above). In contrast, the people who granted me entrance to the field, or at least facilitated it, were all Arabic speakers of Arab origins. Some preliminary conclusions can be drawn from the process of finding participants for this study. Firstly, this shows that the gatekeepers were not sure of who these new arrival families were; many of them, when contacted by phone, were unsure about this category of families or its meaning, imagining that I meant refugees who had just arrived yesterday or the week before on the train. Others did not themselves have the communication skills to approach these families due to the sensitive issue of their flight and the war, as well as the language barrier. A fear of the outcome is also a consideration, especially when these gatekeepers have responsibility for entire establishments and do not wish to look bad in any way (McFadyen & Rankin, 2016). Other studies examining mother tongue teaching in Swedish schools have shown that mother tongue teachers were reluctant to participate, while educational administrators welcomed the researchers (Walldoff, 2017). In this study, one director encouraged me to contact a practitioner, but none of the others showed any interest.

Secondly, the gatekeepers who facilitated my entry to the field knew exactly what was meant by the category of new arrival, given that my first contact was herself a Syrian new arrival (who participated in the study), while the others had worked closely with new arrivals through the municipality and the preschool. They had no difficulty or doubt about how to approach potential

participants, they all spoke Arabic and were originally from Syria or Lebanon, and therefore they were familiar with the new arrivals.

Thirdly, there is the dimension of trust. The potential participants (as shown by the texts they produced and as expressed in the state preschool discourse) had trust issues when dealing with preschool staff. The Arabic-speaking gatekeepers, being more rooted in Swedish society and having knowledge or experience of research activities, assured the Syrian new arrival families that my research would grant them anonymity. This is important because, from the participants' perspectives, there were a number of potential risks in writing stories/texts about their experiences. Some were afraid of writing about past/recent experiences, because it provided written proof of what they really thought, which they suspected might be used against them, as had happened in their homelands to many political dissidents, for example. This could also be a reason why finding participants was such a complicated process. I will return to the handling of trust issues related to my own background in Syria, and speaking Arabic, in the ethical aspects of the study.

Fourthly, I want to mention that bypassing the first, more "official," kind of gatekeepers was not in itself sufficient for my study; I also had to face another, "unofficial," barrier in order to access my potential informants. As mentioned earlier, the list that the refugee worker and his assistant prepared for me had ten names on it, and all of them were men. I first had to speak to these men, explaining my purpose, and only after they had approved and accepted my story was I then allowed to speak to the women and explain to them how to proceed. Other women I met reacted in different ways; some of them had to go home and discuss it with their husbands or get their approval before writing, others who were either single mothers or more educated women who made their own decisions were free to give me the information I asked for. After contacting the informants about their participation in the study, the next step in the process was to inform them about formal ethical aspects and to provide a safe foundation for writing down their perceptions of their meeting with the Swedish preschool.

Writing Texts about Perceptions of Swedish Preschool

The informants who agreed to take part in the study were asked to write about their perceptions and experiences of Swedish preschools, as both a physical and a social place, their encounters with the staff and other parents, what they had imagined Swedish preschools would be like before coming here, and their general worries and/or expectations. They were also asked to reflect upon issues regarding their role within the family and how preschool affected the family dynamics, and also upon their contribution to the study. In addition, the participants were informed in the letter, and also told by me, not to put their names on their stories, to instill trust that the research would follow ethical rules and that their confidentiality and anonymity would be safeguarded

(see Appendix 1) on the content of the study, how they were to contribute to it and the ethical guidelines). A copy of each document was made, and given a code. The copies used for analysis were coded to safeguard the participants' anonymity.

The 19 texts I received vary in length, but they are all written by hand, on lined paper. The longest one is three A4 pages, it is divided into several paragraphs and punctuation is used here and there. Some are about two A4 pages, written with no paragraph breaks and no punctuation. The spacing between the words is tight, except for one which is written in big print and double-line spacing. A few texts cover a full A4 page but are very tightly spaced between the words and the lines. A couple of the texts are very short; one consists of just five lines and one of one and a half lines, saying she is very happy with the preschool and that she has nothing to complain about. Hence, even though I have 19 participants, it is fair to say that I only have 18 texts to analyze. In the analysis, I make detailed studies of the texts and how they have been written. However, I regard all 18 texts as one source comprising several discourses, in a similar way as the texts in the state preschool political discourse are treated as one source (potentially) voicing several discourses about preschools' perceptions of new arrivals.

Arabic is the language the informants used to write about their experiences. Writing in Arabic usually reflects a person's education and interest in standard Arabic. I know that several of my informants hesitated when I asked them to write. I just told them not to worry about the quality of their Arabic and that I was more interested in the content than in the form. In other words, I had to encourage the participants to take the step of writing, and convince them that their writing would be very valuable. In their writings, the informants use a hybrid of oral-language and standard Arabic, some use colloquial forms of Arabic, inserting words from standard Arabic in a scattered way. Others use relatively standardized language. Dialects are detectable and also the use of formally correct written Arabic, which reflects an educated background. Hence, the informants' skills in writing standard Arabic vary a lot; some are semi-literate and have probably barely completed elementary school, while others have gone through higher training. These variations in expression (colloquial, spoken and standardized Arabic), and some orthographic mistakes, make the writings both legible and comprehensible as well as rich in details to be analyzed. In some texts, the ambiguity of meaning caused by the lack of short vowel marks, made me wonder if the word referred to the child or the parent/informant. Therefore, I phoned some of the informants to clarify some parts of their writings. Asking the participants to help me understand parts of the data (their texts) was a way of enhancing the quality of the data. It was part of the ongoing research process (cf. Fairclough, 1992, p. 228).

Even though the informants were refugees from war, references to war are practically non-existent in their writings. They do not write about what they have lost, or who and what they left behind, they do not express any nostalgia

or any feelings regarding relations to their past, they do not write about their journey before arriving in Sweden, nor do they write about future visions, ambitions or plans. Fear and suspicion could be the reason for not writing about these things. It could also be the case that my way of approaching the participants and recruiting them to a research study led them to focus on the task I gave them, i.e. to write about their perceptions of Swedish preschool as a way to make their voices visible via research.

Data Production Stage: Immigrants and The State Preschool Political Discourse

I will now describe the texts I have identified as key in the state preschool political discourse in relation to how preschools approached immigrants from the early 1970s until 2020. The state political discourse about preschool is fairly complex, opening up many possible choices and paths. My focus has been on preschool and immigration, and I strove to make the analysis as comprehensive as possible. Hence, I have deliberately selected the most important texts in terms of relevance to the aim of this thesis. When producing the data set, I chose not to include all possible documents. For example, I do not cover all the changes in the laws regulating preschool, all the reports or preparatory works in committees, the private members' motions to Parliament or the protocols from the parliamentary debates. I do not cover all the preparatory work or working plans for preschool published by Socialstyrelsen. Below, I present the data that I singled out for the analysis in chapter seven.

My selection of data: I have used the documents marked in bold and presented below as data. The motivation for this is that they include specific sections about immigrant children and parents, or present specific arguments about why preschool is particularly important for immigrants. The other texts only mention immigrants briefly, indirectly or not at all. I have included them in the presentation to give an understanding of how I navigated through the state preschool political discourse, and made choices about what to include and exclude, in addition to the explanation above.

In my search for a state preschool political discourse about newly arrived children, parents/guardians and preschool, I started in the early 1970s when the Swedish government commissioned a major inquiry, more than 1100 pages, about the organization and furthering of preschool as a means for advancing family policies and equality (**SOU 1972:26 & 27, *Preschool 1 & 2***).³³ The commission's report was followed by a government bill (**Prop. 1973:136, *Preschool's expansion and organization***)³⁴ suggesting a law regulating general voluntary preschool for all six-year-olds, offering 15 hours free of charge

³³ Sw. "Förskolan 1 & 2."

³⁴ Sw. "Förskolans utbyggnad och organisation."

per week. Two years later, another bill proposed the same thing (Prop. 1975/76:92, *About expansion of childcare*).³⁵ Another government commission's report about childcare stipulated that immigrant children needed extra support (SOU 1975: 87, *Collaboration in childcare*).³⁶ A government agency, Socialstyrelsen, established guidelines in six volumes, *Working Plan for Preschool 1975–1979*, to implement the new preschool organization (Socialstyrelsen, 1975–1979).³⁷

In the mid-1980s, a government bill proposed that preschool must be organized for all children whose parents wanted a place for them (**Prop. 1984/85:209, *About preschool for all children***).³⁸ This bill was not preceded by a government commission's report, but can be seen as a continuation of the politics in the aftermath of the government commission's reports and bills of the 1970s. In 1987, the government agency Socialstyrelsen, on behalf of the government, developed a new national *Pedagogical Program* for preschool (**Socialstyrelsen 1987**).

It took more than 15 years, until the late 1990s, before a new government inquiry was commissioned, now appointed with the aim of introducing a curriculum for Swedish preschool (**SOU 1997:157, *To conquer the outside world***).³⁹ This inquiry resulted in a government bill supporting the curriculum as well as the idea that preschool should become part of the educational sector, rather than social welfare (**Prop. 1997/98:93, *Curriculum for preschool***).⁴⁰ This was a major shift in the societal and political organization of preschool, i.e. from social welfare to education. The government published the first curriculum in the late 1990s (**Regeringskansliet 1998**).⁴¹ A government commission's report discussing a guarantee that all children will be offered a place in preschool was presented in 2013 (SOU 2013:41, *Preschool guarantee*).⁴² Another government commission's report investigated how the preschool class could become compulsory for all six-year-olds (SOU 2015:81, *More time for knowledge—preschool class, extended compulsory schooling and holiday schools*).⁴³

³⁵ Sw. "Om utbyggnad av barnomsorgen."

³⁶ Sw. "Samverkan i barnomsorgen."

³⁷ Sw. "Arbetsplan för förskolan."

³⁸ Sw. "Om förskola för alla barn."

³⁹ Sw. "Att erövra omvärlden."

⁴⁰ Sw. "Läroplan för förskolan."

⁴¹ It was decided in Skolverket's constitution as an ordinance (Sw. förordning) as SKOLFS 1998:16. *Förordning om läroplan för förskolan* (Eng. Ordinance about a curriculum for preschool). The text was the same as in the Bill.

⁴² Sw. "Förskolegaranti."

⁴³ Sw. "Mer tid för kunskap – förskoleklass, förlängd skolplikt och lovskola."

A bill followed this proposal and preschool class became compulsory. Hence, compulsory schooling was expanded by one year for all children resident in Sweden (Prop. 2017/18:9, *Starting school at the age of six*).⁴⁴ Newly arrived children have a right to education but are not governed by the national law on compulsory schooling. The most recent government commission's report dates from 2020 and investigates how language preschool could become compulsory for immigrant children aged three and over, and how preschool could become compulsory for Swedish children from the age of five (**SOU 2020:67, *Preschool for all children***).⁴⁵

A government agency, Skolverket, was responsible for the subsequent curriculum revisions (**Skolverket 2006, 2011, 2016**). In 2018, a new curriculum was published, rewording the description of "preschool's institutional practice" into "education" (**Skolverket 2018**).⁴⁶ Hence, the shift towards perceiving preschool primarily as education was further emphasized in the most recent revision, dated 2018. The description of the 2018 curriculum as new is based on the order of decision-making. An ordinance at Skolverket stipulated that the 1998 curriculum was decided. The upcoming revisions were described as changes in the ordinance. However, the 2018 curriculum was described as a replacement for the 1998 curriculum, since the revisions were major.⁴⁷ In summary, I reviewed the following texts and chose the ones marked in bold to be included in the data set:

Three government commissions: **SOU 1972:26 *Förskolan 1*** (353 pages); **SOU 1972:27 *Förskolan 2*** (725 pages)⁴⁸; **SOU 1997:157 *Att erövra omvärlden. Förslag till läroplan för förskolan*** (223 pages); SOU 2013:41 *Förskolegaranti* (353 pages); SOU 2015:81 *Mer tid för kunskap – förskoleklass, förlängd skolplikt och lovskola* (356 pages); **SOU 2020:67 *Förskola för alla barn*** (372 pages).

Three government bills: **Proposition 1973:136 *Förskoleverksamhetens utbyggnad och organisation*** (100 pages); **Proposition 1984/85:209 *Förskola för alla barn*** (28 pages); **Proposition 1997/98:93 *Läroplan för förskolan*** (52

⁴⁴ Sw. "Skolstart vid sex års ålder."

⁴⁵ Sw. "Förskola för alla barn."

⁴⁶ I have translated the Swedish wording "förskolans verksamhet" as "preschool's institutional practice." "Education" is "utbildning" in Swedish.

⁴⁷ The changes in ordinance in the Skolverket's constitution were: SKOLFS 1998:16.

Förordning om läroplan för förskolan; SKOLFS 2005:11. *Förordning om läroplan för förskolan, ändring*; SKOLFS 2006:22. *Förordning om läroplan för förskolan, ändring*; SKOLFS 2010:35. *Förordning om läroplan för förskolan, ändring*; SKOLFS 2011:69. *Förordning om läroplan för förskolan, ändring*; SKOLFS 2016:37. *Förordning om läroplan för förskolan, ändring*; SKOLFS 2018:50. *Förordning om läroplan för förskolan, ersätter (1998:16)*. I have analyzed the published curricula, and not the ordinances.

⁴⁸ I count the two reports from 1972 as one.

pages); Proposition 2017/18:9 *Skolstart vid sex års ålder* (105 pages).

One pedagogical program from a government agency, **Socialstyrelsen 1987:3 *Pedagogiskt program för förskolan***.

One curriculum published by the government, Lpfö98 (**Regeringskansliet 1998**) and three revisions of that curriculum from a government agency, **Skolverket 2006, 2011, 2016**. A new curriculum, Lpfö18, from **Skolverket 2018**.

The title of a text reveals much about its content and the arguments it puts forward. In general, government commissions' reports and bills have a common structure: i) a description of the proposal addressed, ii) a general background, often including some kind of description of a historical development, iii) an investigation of the issue or problem to be solved, together with suggestions for how to solve it, and iv) a conclusion. The bills followed this general pattern but were more condensed and also included opinions from stakeholders. The number of pages was between 30 and 100 for the bills. Government commissions' reports were between 350 and more than 1100 pages. The guidelines from Socialstyrelsen were supposed to provide support for practitioners in their work and to improve the quality of preschool. They provide scientific perspectives as well as concrete ideas about how to organize and work in preschool.

The curriculum differs from the guidelines. It starts with a section on fundamental values and the task of preschool, followed by goals and guidelines. These are presented as goals to strive for. The first curriculum, Lpfö98, has 15 pages and the new one, Lpfö18, has 26 pages. Hence, the curriculum does not include any scientific perspectives or detailed guidelines about how to achieve the goals. However, since the curriculum has a legal status, it increases the focus on striving to fulfill the goals in preschool's daily work.

The People Writing Policy Texts

As already indicated, the state preschool political discourse concerns the government's goals for the organization and aims of Swedish preschool, as expressed in government commissions' reports and bills. This means that the writers of these texts were formally appointed with the mission of writing; as civil servants in the state political apparatus, politicians, different kinds of experts such as heads of state authorities, consultants, specialists or researchers, in addition to representatives of different professional groups. In sum, all the writers were representatives of some kind of formal authority and their experiences and expertise were the criteria for their selection. Furthermore, they formally agreed to conduct the inquiry.

It was the government that commissioned an inquiry by formulating the directives and it was the appointed commissioners' task to execute it. Sweden has a long tradition of establishing such government commissions and they typically include representatives from the state authorities as well as researchers, and sometimes representatives from relevant professional groups. There has been a general shift during the fifty-year period under study here, in that the government commissions included more stakeholders at the start of the period than today. This is also reflected in the government commissions reviewed here; the commission of 1972 included several experts from diverse fields of research, whereas the latest commission, in 2020, was managed by one appointed expert with expertise in formal politics.

A government bill reflects not only the commissioned inquiries' directive and concluding proposition, but also the different consultation responses given by formal organizations and authorities in response to a government commission's report. A government bill is thus an argument in support of the government directives in relation to the pros and cons formulated by different stakeholders with relevance to the issue at hand. As such, government commissions' reports and government bills reflect the government's policy, at the same time as the bills include broader perspectives and motivations. A bill must go through Parliament, where voting for or against the proposition is conducted. I have not followed up on the voting procedure or its results.

The Pedagogical Program, published by the government agency Socialstyrelsen, was written by civil servants who cooperated with researchers. The civil servants are presented as the "working group," while the researchers are the "expert group." The published program includes the names of the researchers and civil servants.

The curriculum revisions published by the government agency Skolverket were mainly written by civil servants (not named). The major revision of 2018 was based on a report written by named researchers.

Ethical Considerations

Trust between researcher and informants is essential. When Ulla Björnberg (2013) discusses the importance of trust, she says that trust requires willingness to see the other person and to want to be seen and socially acknowledged by those who participate in a social interaction, and that in a formal situation (such as research), the (ethical) rules that are applied need to be clear and fair. When recruiting participants, I initially approached them to inform them about the project. In addition, they were given a written information letter. The letter stated the aim of the study, described the method for gathering data and explained the ethical considerations and measures that would be taken in order to safeguard their anonymity, confidentiality and privacy. The informed consent form and the information letter were written in Arabic (see Appendices

1&2). This gave the newly arrived families who had not yet mastered the Swedish language a chance to understand the subject and the purpose of the study, as well as all aspects of the ethical measures taken to ensure their privacy. In addition, I explained to the informants that participation in the study was voluntary, and that they had the right to withdraw at any time without giving an explanation. I provided them with my phone number and email address to get in touch with me if at any time they felt unsure about their participation in the study.

When they sent me their texts, I scanned them, and stored the original texts, together with the consent forms, in the university's safe deposit for research data. I then used the copied texts for the analysis. Hence, all original documents are stored in the university's safe deposit. Only my supervisors and I have access to the research data.

The copies used for analysis were coded to safeguard the participants' anonymity. As mentioned above, I discouraged the informants from adding their names to the texts, in order to increase their feeling of anonymity and trust. Their identities, such as name, address and other similar information, were not regarded as relevant to the study. In order to identify variations among the texts, the informants were, however, asked to state their gender and place of origin. This is in line with The Swedish Research Council's guidelines declaring that, in some areas of research, the identity of individuals is of no interest, especially if the researcher is seeking to find variations in his/her study (Vetenskapsrådet, 2017). The names used in this thesis are pseudonyms.

Conclusions and Reflections

To conclude, in retrospect, I realize that when designing the study, I underestimated how difficult it would be to access data, i.e. what was available in the domain of new arrivals and preschool as described in new arrivals' own voices. I did not want to conduct interviews because I did not want to put my informants in a position where an institution and a representative of Swedish society, i.e. myself as researcher from a university, was asking questions about their experiences. For the reasons explained above, this decision was based both on the issue of trust (and what can be expected in such a situation regarding the quality of the data produced), and on my interest in their subjective discursive experiences. I totally misjudged the situation and that led to a really troublesome and time-consuming process involving several obstacles. I met unexpected gatekeepers as well as unexpected methods of entry to the field that I initially wanted to study (cf. Fairclough, 1992, pp. 227–228).

However, after experiencing these difficulties, my conclusion is that they were an important part of the discursive event of which this research process forms a part. I do believe that my own background and experiences, at many levels and with reference to both cultural knowledge and language skills, was

an important aspect that made it *at all possible* to gain access to this set of data. I hope that my experiences can assist other researchers when proceeding with similar projects.

Another conclusion relates to the differences in the qualities of the data production stages and the implications for the texts produced and consumed. In addition to what has been said above about the texts produced in my research as discursive practice, the informants' writings differ in several respects. It could be argued that research is a formal practice, regulated by ethical standards and embedded in university policies, and hence shares similar traits with the texts in the state preschool political discourse.

The informants were asked to write their texts in order to share their perceptions and expert knowledge as new arrival families meeting preschool, but they did not do so as representatives of anything other than themselves. My informants' writings are informal texts about their subjective experiences (even though they are part of a discursive event, see above), which could explain why I chose to analyze linguistic traits indicating both relationality and identity as expressing agency in different ways. The texts were mainly written specifically for this research, to be read by me, and protected by formal ethical guidelines. The texts produced in the political sphere were never personal and they were written to be consumed in a public context, as part of a democratic process, where transparency and the notion of the public common good prevails.

There are no specific ethical considerations to protect written work that is already in the public domain. I do have ethical considerations in mind when analyzing the texts that are in the public domain, but that is different from protecting respondents and myself. To generate a sensible and justified analysis of the texts, as well as presenting the results in a responsible and accurate way, is a concern when handling all of the texts.

The point that I want to stress is that, even though all of the text production concerns the same topic, in a sense, it has been achieved in varying settings and from varying perspectives. I regard this as a strength of my study, highlighting that the three-dimensional model of how discourse can be understood in a discursive event gives a nuanced and rich description of how new arrivals perceive Swedish preschool, and vice versa. I want to highlight, though, that the point of departure of the study was my informants' writings.

In the next chapters, I present my interpretation of the texts produced by new arrival immigrant parents and the texts that are part of the state preschool political discourse focusing on immigrants as a discursive event.

Chapter 5: New Arrival Immigrant Families' Discourses about Language Learning

Helping children to develop language and communication skills is one of preschool's main tasks. It has been part of the state preschool political discourse for at least fifty years, as presented in chapter seven. As will be shown in this chapter, the new arrivals' writings also addressed this as a central concern. When I approached the informants, I did not ask them to write about their children's experiences of language acquisition, I asked them to write about their experiences and perceptions of preschool. Still, they made this an important aspect of their texts, which shows that there is a dialectical relationship between their own texts and the state discourse. By this, I mean that their perceptions as reflected in their writings have been influenced by the dominant preschool discourse in society, and likewise their concerns have had an impact on the formulation of the state preschool political discourse. The insistence on a dialectical relationship between the informants' texts and the state discourse implies that the participants in this study, in addition to representing themselves as individuals, are also part of a major discursive event, i.e. being/becoming an immigrant. The presence of new arrival immigrants and their experiences over the years has shaped, and still reshapes, the state preschool political discourse, as explained in chapter three. This dialectical view opens up the possibility of an analysis at both the micro-level (the individual new arrival immigrant who writes about their own experience) and the macro-level (the immigrant figure as depicted in the established discourse).

As explained in the section on method, my interest is to move beyond this "obvious" level of analysis to gain an in-depth understanding of how new arrivals articulate their agency. Therefore, in this chapter, I examine the discourses that my informants used when they wrote about the Swedish language and preschool.

As it was a recurring theme in the texts submitted by my informants, "language" directed me to look at how the parents perceived their children's linguistic reality, in which they themselves played an important role. Therefore, I conducted a content analysis to examine the parents' accounts in relation to language (both Swedish and Arabic), and how they wrote their own agency into the text in relation to their children and to preschool.

Language was a central theme in the writings submitted by my informants, and learning Swedish was depicted as key to integrating into the new society in most parents' writings. In this section, I focus on parents who expressed concerns about their children starting preschool without having any knowledge of the Swedish language as well as those who displayed the opposite, having no such concerns at all. I relate this issue to how the parents expressed their own agency in relation to their children, to preschool and to the state preschool political discourse. In addition, I looked for how the parents wrote about time, and whether or not change and transformation were expressed in their writings. The parents' writings differed in their approach to these issues, which explains why I have singled them out for an in-depth analysis. I present them below as: activating agency through emotional responses, agency variations in different settings, agency through resistance and acceptance, agency as a matter of language proficiency: talk or understand, and agency through learning daily practices.

Activating Agency through Emotional Responses

One mother, Lina, described her experience and the fear aroused in her when her daughter started preschool without knowing any Swedish. Lina began describing her daughter by indicating her age, four years old, and she marked the time spent at preschool, 14 months. Then she expressed her fears relating to her daughter's Arab origins and not understanding the Swedish language. Lina was also fearful because she had heard of racial discrimination against Arab children, and also because of her daughter's health condition:

My daughter is four years old. She started preschool 14 months ago. Of course, I was very afraid for her, firstly because she's of Arab origin and doesn't understand the Swedish language. Secondly, I was afraid of racial discrimination that I heard a lot about concerning the treatment of Arab children and, thirdly, because of her health.⁴⁹ (Lina)

The mother was aware of her daughter being the other in several ways. It is worth noticing that, when specifying the causes of her fear, she marked being of Arab origin and not being able to understand Swedish together in the first category, hence relating them to each other. Her fears related to these aspects

⁴⁹ عمر ابنتي 4 سنوات دخلت إلى الروضة منذ 14 شهر طبعاً كنت خائفة عليها جداً أولاً لأنها من أصول عربية ولا تفهم اللغة السويدية وثانياً خفت من موضوع التمييز العنصري الذي سمعت عنه بخصوص معاملة الأطفال العرب وثالثاً بسبب وضعها الصحي.

were the worst, marked by her adding the adverb “very,”⁵⁰ to them. The second and third causes she singled out were specific, and different from each other. However, the two latter aspects were not as frightening as her origins and not understanding the Swedish language. This shows that Lina’s first encounter with preschool was associated with feelings of fear and threat. It was her own fear she was writing about, hence underlining her agentic position. The description of fear signals that she cared about her daughter when facing something new, preschool. The agency she described was provoked by negative assumptions about the new, at the same time as they triggered positive emotions of care.

This negative perception of preschool changed over time, a change connected to her daughter’s language learning. Lina wrote about her daughter’s personal and language development:

My daughter’s personality developed quickly and she started speaking some Swedish words and in certain cases they would bring a teacher from a different section, who is an Arab, to explain to them what Helen wants.⁵¹ (Lina)

In addition to these positive outcomes of being in preschool, *they* took active measures to facilitate communication with the child. Lina did not specify who “they” were; however, one can assume that it was a teacher or other staff member in the preschool. Attributing the adjective “Arab” to the teacher they brought can be interpreted in different ways. The person’s Arabness could be understood as both a linguistic and cultural reference, because the person had the capacity to “explain”⁵² to the Swedes, who did not understand her daughter, what she wanted. We cannot know in what situations the Arabic-speaking practitioner was called for; however, it was clear that the parent acknowledged this as an active form of support for her daughter’s development in this new context. That the child’s development moved on “quickly” was also underlined in this mother’s text.

In addition to this overt attention to how time was important in Lina’s writing in relation to her daughter, she also expressed her changed perception of preschool via the use of time references; she started off by defining how long it was since her daughter had started preschool. When writing about her fears associated with this, she used the past tense, to position it in a time before. The daughter’s first use of Swedish was also described in the past tense. When describing how her daughter’s feelings of happiness and enthusiasm had developed, she situated it in the past tense and combined it with the present tense, saying that her daughter wanted “to go there every day” as part of the positive experience. After that, the writing continued in the present tense. Bringing in

⁵⁰ جداً.

⁵¹ تطورت شخصية ابنتي بسرعة وبدأت تتكلم بضع الكلمات السويدية وفي حالات معينة كانوا يستقدمون معلمة من قسم آخر وهي عربية لكي تشرح لهم ماذا تريد هيلين.

⁵² تشرح.

an Arabic-speaking person to help her daughter to be understood was thus described in the present tense. This shows how linguistic features of temporality were part of the constitution of her writings and portrayed notions of change and transformation.

As this analysis shows, the parent described a changed perception of preschool, from an initial fearful worry about what might happen there to a positive perception, after meeting the preschool and experiencing it, as a tool for development in general, and as a promoter of language learning and a helper for her daughter.⁵³

Lina clearly stated that it was her daughter who started preschool, and not herself, as though she was separated from the preschool that her daughter was attending and was not claiming any personal agency in relation to it, other than at the beginning when she reacted with fear. When it came to the home situation, she wrote about herself as the competent mother who was in charge. She was the “I” who observed, felt and responded actively to information and consultations from the preschool practitioners. Throughout her text, she mainly used “I.” She presented herself through the “I” and an array of verbs such as the worried mother and the competent mother who asks, listens, observes, feels, dislikes, likes, teaches and corrects.

The few passages where Lina switched to “us” occurred when, together with other family members, she was seen or approached by persons outside the family, such as preschool practitioners or health staff. Even though “us” is not individually as agentic as “I,” she positioned herself as a valuable member of the family. “Us” constituted a form of “we” as seen by others. It was an “us” that was needed as a source to provide a good life for her daughter. In the use of “us,” Lina was constituting relationships between the family, the preschool and the healthcare system; all were involved and cooperating and the preschool practitioners’ efforts and engagement were acknowledged for making the child both healthy and happy. This meant, according to Lina, that her daughter looked forward to going to preschool each day.

Lina’s positive perception of how preschool was supporting her child’s development could be interpreted as meaning that she was supportive of the preschool’s mission in an indirect way, and in parallel with inscribing her own agency at home. In the next example, I present a parent who was clearly writing agency into the text in relation to preschool, making his children’s stay in preschool stand out primarily due to his actions. With time, however, this father transformed his view to give the practitioners agency, via bringing in his children’s reflections on being at preschool.

Language learning as a key component in the perception of preschool was also recognized by Imad, a father who presented the meeting with preschool

⁵³ In addition, a teacher was involved with and took care of the daughter’s use of insulin, and in relation to this contacted the parents at home, which also evoked positive reactions from the parents in relation to the preschool (see chapter six on belonging).

as a process of change for both parents and children. However, he started his writing about this with a reference to his own agency, when he wrote that it was “I” who took “my children” to preschool. Hence, taking the children to preschool was not imposed on him and his family, but rather was a choice that he made. He then explained that this was “a new thing for them,” i.e. for the children. This shows that Imad was eager to present himself as a person with agency, even though he was in the position of a new arrival:

Hello! At the beginning when I took my children to the kindergarten, it was a new thing for them. There was no child who spoke their language, which is why they used to cry and wanted to go home and play with their mum and dad.⁵⁴
(Imad)

Presenting the situation as new to the children but not himself can also be interpreted as a way to keep and maintain agency. In a sense, he positioned himself as above a situation where the new could be problematic because, he explained, there were no other children in the preschool who spoke “their language,” i.e. Arabic, which made the children “cry and want to go home.” This is described as a recurring situation, and what the children wanted to do instead of being at preschool was to “go home and play with their mum and dad.” Again, this father made himself agentic in relation to his children; he knew why they cried and what they wanted to achieve by crying, and it was the family, their mum and dad, whom the children wanted to “play” with. Hence, he made it clear that playing in preschool, a key activity and goal in Swedish preschool, was something that neither he nor his children were interested in. To play at home was a preferred activity. The key factor singled out as causing this negative situation for the children, but not himself, when in preschool, was that there was “no child who spoke their language.” Language thus became an important aspect in the meeting with preschool, and not being met with the language he defined as their own caused a negative experience.

He then continued to pursue his agentic status by explaining his and his wife’s role in their children’s adaptation to preschool when he wrote:

We stayed with the kids at preschool for a period of three weeks until they got used to the atmosphere there and that’s how, bit by bit, they adapted and started understanding the language and made new friends at preschool.⁵⁵ (Imad)

What this father was expressing in this passage was a need to have an agentic role in his children’s meeting with and adjustment to preschool. It was as

⁵⁴ مرحبا! في البداية عندما أخذت أولادي إلى الروضة كان شيء جديد بالنسبة لهم. ولم يكن هناك طفل يتكلم بلغتهم لذلك كانوا يبكون ويريدون أن يذهبوا إلى البيت ويلعبوا مع بابا وماما.
⁵⁵ بقينا عند الأطفال في الروضة لمدة ثلاثة أسابيع حتى تعودوا على الجو هناك وهكذا رويداً رويداً تأقلموا وأصبحوا يفهمون اللغة وصار لديهم أصدقاء جدد في الروضة.

though he even gave himself and his wife all the credit for enabling their children to adjust to preschool, thus ignoring the role of the practitioners. It is also clear that what started as a crying experience during the first few weeks of being in preschool transformed into a situation where the children started to “understand the language,” i.e. the new language of Swedish, and also made “new friends.” In this way, both language acquisition and building social relations had positive outcomes for the children’s experience of preschool, while at the same time the parents were there to ensure a feeling of safety for the children.

Later on in his text, this father used references to his children to both praise and criticize the practitioners in preschool. He was indirect when criticizing the preschool, writing that “sometimes there might be” a situation in which the practitioners paid less attention to his children than to other children in the class. He explained that, due to this possible neglect, his children sometimes refused to go to preschool. He wrote:

There is an effort that the pedagogues make with regard to children here in the kindergarten. Sometimes there might be special attention given to some children on the part of some pedagogues. Because sometimes my children say “we don’t want to go to kindergarten.” So perhaps there is child neglect which makes him express such a wish.⁵⁶ (Imad)

Imad’s conclusion was that his children sensed a lack of care or attention, which meant that they did not want to go there. When he voiced this critical remark, he made his children’s agency visible, it was they who told him about the situation. This was different from the way in which he previously showed his recognition of the positive role of preschool; when he gave the practitioners credit for the efforts they made to enhance his children’s development. He and his wife had had discussions directly with the practitioners. When asking his children about preschool, the children said, he wrote, that they loved their practitioners and enjoyed learning from them and participating in organized activities that improved their comprehension and attention. When writing about the practitioners as benefitting his children, Imad was presenting himself as a resource; it was he who asked them the question, to which they gave a positive answer. Thus, this father used references to his own experiences and also to his children’s experiences when he acknowledged the preschool as a resource.

In parallel with Imad’s way of making himself an agent in relation to preschool and its positive influence on his children, he was constituting himself as an agent in relation to home and “my culture,” i.e. his own background and origins. It was “I” who “teach my children about my culture” and it was “I”

⁵⁶ هناك جهد تبذله المربيّات مع الأطفال هنا في الروضة. يمكن أن يكون هناك اهتمام خاص ببعض الأطفال أحياناً من قبل بعض المربيّات. لأنه أحياناً أطفالاً يقولون لي لا نريد أن نذهب إلى الروضة، يمكن أن يكون هناك عدم الاهتمام بالطفل حتى يلجأ إلى هكذا رغبة.

who “talk to them and play games with them from my own culture, that is, from my own society.” Imad was thus not setting up an either/or between what he had left and what he arrived to. He was rather producing an understanding of the belief in a coexistence, that the before and the now can prosper side by side in a way that was beneficial to his children. He explained it like this:

We can say that my children are benefiting a lot from being in the kindergarten and playing with other children from different cultures and interacting with them and strengthening their skills, learning the language, the letters and numbers, even before going to school.⁵⁷ (Imad)

Even though this father was acknowledging preschool as a place for diverse learning, including cultural diversity, he was not saying that preschool should cater for his children’s learning of their mother tongue. On the contrary, he was explicit in constituting, via his writing, an agentic role for himself as the provider of teaching about the Arabic language and culture as he understood it and in relation to his own background. This would take place at home. This teaching included the active use of play and games, including children’s literature and songs from his own childhood. He was thus activating his own agency to use the same tools that were prescribed and formulated by the preschool curriculum for teaching Swedish language and culture, and applying them to mother tongue teaching. According to the curriculum, children’s literature, songs and games should be used to teach *all children* in preschool about Swedish cultural heritage (Lpfö 18:9). Even though Imad’s children ought to benefit from Swedish preschool, they must also have space and place, i.e. at home, to develop other skills, such as the language and culture of Imad’s country of origin.

Imad was explicit in his positioning of his changed notions of preschool within a timeframe. In his writing, he used time via references such as: “at the beginning,” “a period of three weeks,” “until,” “bit by bit,” in addition to starting his writing in the past tense and ending it in the present tense. He was thus developing the notion of a positive transformation in how his children had benefitted and developed skills when in preschool, as well as at home. He was also writing his own agency into this transformative endeavor, and making himself important in relation to both the role that preschool can play for his children and the role he himself can play in teaching his children about his culture at home.

Imad illustrated his efforts in a positive light, in relation to both his own agency and his children’s agency; from crying as new arrivals, the children and their family have gone through a time of transformation, with the outcome of perceiving both the new and what they had left behind as advantages. The

⁵⁷ نستطيع أن نقول بأن أطفالنا يستفيدون كثيراً من تواجدهم بالروضة من حيث اللعب مع أطفال آخرين من المجتمعات المختلفة والتواصل معهم وتقوية مهاراتهم وتعليم اللغة والحروف والأرقام قبل الذهاب إلى المدرسة. فهذه مرحلة مهمة جداً قبل الذهاب إلى المدرسة، هي مرحلة التكوين.

new, and real change, was this transformation to a situation where the experience of co-existence and co-production of multiple views was enriching. In doing this, he was writing his own agency into the text, both as an “I” and as part of a collective family “we.” He was also depicting his children’s agency, because they were able to refuse or accept offerings about their parents’ culture and the preschool’s.

Agency as Communication Skills and Integration into the Host Society

Selma was a mother who described how her daughter was able to “integrate” and establish social relations in spite of not having perfect command of the Swedish language. She attributed this successful socializing process to the practitioners at the preschool who were able to use drawings, handcrafts, dancing and playing as a bridge to teach the child linguistic skills “rapidly.” She wrote:

My daughter entered preschool upon our arrival in Sweden and she was able to integrate and establish social relations in spite of not mastering the Swedish language, since the preschool staff made use of drawing, arts and crafts, dance and play as a bridge to teach the child linguistic skills rapidly.⁵⁸ (Selma)

When this mother wrote about linguistic skills, she was broadening the understanding of language. It was not only about mastering Swedish (or Arabic) verbally, but instead being able to communicate through other resources. She told us that language was not a precondition for integration, or even for making friends, and that one can acquire a new language. The practitioners in the preschool initiated such alternative resources by using different tools for teaching children to communicate, rather than just mastering the Swedish language. These tools were “bridges” for her daughter’s “rapid” learning. Here, the preschool was perceived as a place for rapid language learning, and the practitioners’ competences were highlighted as important. This parent clearly granted agency to the practitioners. She was also granting agency to her daughter, who had managed both to “integrate and establish social relations” as a new arrival in the country and in the new context of preschool.

As with Lina, this mother wrote about her daughter’s presence in preschool as something that she was not particularly involved in herself. It was the daughter who had entered preschool upon arrival, and the mother did not seem to be particularly involved in that, it was presented as a good thing and an

⁵⁸ ابنتي دخلت الروضة مباشرة لدى قدومنا للسويد استطاعت الاندماج وإقامة علاقة إجتماعية بالرغم من عدم إتقانها للغة السويدية حيث استطاع العاملين في الروضة أن يتخذوا من الرسم والأعمال اليدوية والرقص واللعب جسراً لتعليم الطفل المهارات اللغوية بسرعة.

achievement of the daughter. Selma also affirmed that her daughter changed in a positive way through her encounter with preschool; she became integrated and established social relations via communicating without mastering the Swedish language. The way in which this mother formed a positive perception of preschool can be interpreted, in this context, as suggesting that she indirectly supported the idea that preschool was enriching her child's life.

Rana was a parent who had a similar experience to Imad. She wrote that her child got a preschool place in a neighborhood that was populated by Swedes and, as a consequence, "there was not a single Arabic child or Arabic-speaking one."⁵⁹

We got a place in a preschool in a Swedish neighborhood, which meant there was not a single Arab child or Arabic-speaking one. There were lots of difficulties, she started to feel a greater isolation, but the preschool administration was very cooperative and they requested a special teacher to come and sit with her for a period of 15 days until she felt safe.⁶⁰ (Rana)

This caused "a lot of difficulties" and made her daughter feel increasingly "isolated." At the beginning of her writing, this mother mentioned that her daughter had lived in a good social milieu in Syria, surrounded by grandparents, aunts, cousins, etc. Hence, before arriving in Sweden, this girl had had many social contacts, which were all based on the Arabic language. Coming to Sweden and not being able to meet children who spoke the same language became a source of difficulties in preschool because there were no Arabic-speaking children there.

As with Imad, this mother highlighted (though not to the same extent) her own and the father's role in making their child "feel safe" in preschool. She wrote:

Of course, this didn't happen immediately, but only after I and her father spent a period that exceeded two months going there to be with her. She cried a lot in spite of the fact that the personnel were very good...anyway, the girl adapted to her preschool and liked it and started to make new friends. The teachers

⁵⁹ It is still not clear if all the children were actually native Swedes or if, by Swedes, she simply meant non-Arabs, because other informants have also categorized all non-Arabs as Swedes. In an Arab country, one usually uses *Europe/European/foreigner* to describe westerners, and seldom talks specifically about a certain country/nationality, so the practice of homogenizing is part of Arabic culture.

⁶⁰ حصلنا مقعد بروضه موجوده بمنطقه سكن سويديه وبالتالي مافي ولا طفل عربي أو بيحكي اللغة العربية. كان في صعوبة كثير صارت تحس بعزلة أكبر بس إدارة الروضة كانت متعاونة وطلبوا مدرّسة خصوصي تجي تقعد معها مدة 15 يوم لحتى تحس بالأمان.

played the greatest role, because they were keen to get her integrated so she would not remain alone.⁶¹ (Rana)

Thus, Rana highlighted her own and her husband's active role in supporting their daughter to be in preschool, and to stay there even though she felt isolated and cried. Their presence did not seem to have stopped their child from feeling bad, but it made it bearable for her, and perhaps also her parents, to cope with being in preschool. Rana also pointed out that the preschool administration eventually supported the process of making her daughter feel more at ease in preschool. After the two-month period when Rana and her husband were with their child in preschool, a special practitioner was assigned to "come and sit with" her. Rana clearly described the special practitioner as a passive intervention, i.e. someone just sitting with her daughter. However, this might also be interpreted as an indirect criticism; that the special practitioner did not speak Arabic and did not share the language with her daughter, or as a way to indirectly enhance their own parental agency. As parents, they were actively accompanying their daughter, while the practitioner just sat with her. Either way, Rana acknowledged that the preschool administration made efforts to help her daughter at the same time as she was underlining her own and her husband's agency. The practitioner stayed as long as was needed for the girl to feel safe, 15 days, which was less than the two months spent by the parents at preschool. During the following four months, the daughter's "language development was excellent." However, Rana's story did not end here. New problems for her daughter emerged when the parents decided to change preschool. She wrote:

After a period of four months, we got a place in a preschool near our home, and here the problem started. The preschool had a large number of Arabs. Her language development was excellent, but after she moved it became bad, actually non-existent. She stopped developing the language. She now had only two friends, those who spoke her language. Every time I went to the preschool, I asked the teachers to try to get them integrated so they would learn the culture, the language, but it was no use, they were saying if she likes sitting with these two girls we can't do anything.⁶² (Rana)

⁶¹ طبعاً هاد الشيء مومباشرة وإنما بعد ما قضينا أنا وأبوها فترة بتزيد عن شهرين ونحن عم ندوم معها...كانت تبكي كبير رغم أنو الكادر كثير منيح. المهم البنيت اتأقلمت وحببت روضتها وبلشت تتعرف على رفقات كان الدور الأكبر للإنسان لأنو هنن كانوا حريصين أنها تندمج لحتى ما تبقى وحيدة.

⁶² بعد مدة 4 شهور حصلنا مكان بروضه قريبه من البيت وهون بلشت المشكله..الروضه فيها عدد منيح من العرب...التطور اللغوي كان عندها ممتاز بعد ما انتقلت صار سيء بل شبه معدوم ماعاد اتطورت باللغه..صار عندها فقط بنتين أصدقاء الها كونون هنن يلي بيحكوا لغتها وكل ما رحنت عالروضه اطلب من الأنسان أنو يحاولو يدمجهم بالجو لحتى يتعلموا الثقافه، اللغه ويس بدون فائدة يقولو إذا هي حابه تقعد مع هدول البنيتين ما فينا نعمل شي.

Rana and her husband were eventually offered a place for their daughter in a preschool near “our home.” This was a preschool with “a large number of Arabs,” she explained and now, at the new preschool, “the problem” started. After sharing her presentation of the first encounter with preschool, where the child cried and felt isolated, I interpret this as her way of presenting the most important problem. “The problem” was that her daughter’s language development stagnated, it went from “bad” to “actually non-existent” and the girl “stopped developing the language.” The reason for this, according to Rana, was the prevalence of children speaking Arabic, leading her daughter to have no friends other than “only two friends, those who speak her language.” She did not perceive these new Arab friendships as a positive occurrence, which might have been expected after reading her initial writing in which she presented the lack of children speaking Arabic as a negative. Now, in this new preschool context, the alignment with only Arab children became a problematic situation. The reason for this, the mother wrote, was because it put a stop to both her child’s learning Swedish and to the integration process she had undergone at the first preschool. She was herself trying to change the situation by asking the practitioners in the second preschool for help: “I asked the teachers to try to get them integrated so they could learn the culture, the language.” She did this repeatedly, every time she went to the preschool, she stated. Rana was working hard to make her child take an active part in the integration process by continuing to learn Swedish instead of only spending time with Arabs.

The practitioners’ response to Rana’s request was to turn it down. Their answer, according to her, was that if her daughter wished to be with these two specific girls “we can’t do anything.” My interpretation is that Rana had become aware of the role that preschool could play for her daughter’s learning Swedish and hence becoming integrated into Swedish society. It was a major problem for her that the integration process that started in the first preschool stopped when her daughter moved to the second preschool. She actively strived to make the language development continue and asked for help but was turned down by the practitioners, who had an obligation to implement the working guidelines about preschool being a tool for integration. This shows that Rana was also actively working to meet and implement these guidelines and she was concerned when she did not succeed in her mission. She was constituting herself as an agent in several ways, including by writing down her experiences in this research project, as though that could be a way to voice her concerns about her daughter and the preschool’s integration.

But why did the practitioners turn down Rana’s request? Is it as simple as to say that they were not implementing the policy? My suggestion is that two logics meet and clash in this situation. Rana constituted herself as wanting her child to pursue the integration project by learning Swedish. The practitioners, on the other hand, could be pursuing another agenda in the preschool policy guidelines, namely to respect the child’s own interests. For them, it was important to uphold the child’s right to choose her own friends, and that was

prioritized over meeting a parent's request to force the child to choose other friends. However, in this particular situation, the mother was proposing that the aims set out in the preschool political discourse were more important than the child's right to choose friends. I have no intention of judging which strategy is more important. It is worth noticing, though, that the mother's struggle to make her child learn Swedish became visible in this social practice of writing. The result, according to the parent, was that the preschool practitioners, in this particular example, chose not to support her point of view or her agency.

This seemed to have caused frustration because, later in the text, Rana expressed her belief that Swedish parents teach their children not to play or interact with foreign children. I will elaborate on this in the next chapter. I can only conclude with the reflection that what, at the beginning, seemed like an obstacle for her daughter, to be with only Swedish-speaking children in preschool, transformed into a problem of being with only Arabic-speaking children and being excluded from access to native Swedish speakers. My interpretation is that Rana related to the state preschool political discourse and the importance it places on not being isolated in preschools and residential areas where contact with native Swedish speakers is minimal. She had faith in the preschool and supported its goals. She was striving to do what the discourse prescribes, but this was met with resistance from the preschool practitioners. She was trapped in the situation of raising a child who might become an un-integrated new arrival, and thus a problem, for society and herself. The frustration she expresses in her text is a form of agency, albeit a negative one. The initial change from feelings of isolation and loneliness felt in the first preschool disappeared in the second preschool, to be replaced by an even worse problem. It was as though the child's process of transformation and change stopped. The situation when the writing was produced was marked by stagnation, and that produced a sense of despair.

Agency through Resistance and Acceptance

Laila had a son and a daughter and her writing expressed great distress concerning her children's language acquisition:

The first time my son went to kindergarten, one month after we arrived in Sweden, it was very hard to understand them. Because they didn't give us a translator until after my child had been at school for four days. My son suffered a lot until he began to understand and speak Swedish.⁶³ (Laila)

⁶³ أول مرة راح ابني على الروضة بعد ما اجينا على السويد بشهر كان كثير صعب انا نفهم عليهم لأنو ما جابولنا مترجم لبعده أربع أيام من دوام ابني وكثير تعذب ابني لحتنا صار يعرف يفهم ويحكي سويدي.

She explained that her son “went to kindergarten,” as though he did it on his own, one month after their arrival in Sweden. There was no translator at the preschool and “it was very hard to understand them,” she said. My interpretation is that “them” refers to both the other children and the practitioners in preschool. The text is not clear about whether Laila was with her son in preschool; although she explained that a translator “for us” arrived after four days, she also wrote that this happened when “my child had been at preschool for four days,” as though it was only him who was there. Since a two-week introductory period during which parent/s accompany their children is a common practice, my conclusion is that Laila was actually with him. Even after the translator arrived, being in a situation where he did not understand the language spoken in preschool was a big concern for the boy for a period of time:

At first, my son became almost mute, he didn’t distinguish between Arabic and Swedish anymore. My child’s situation is much better now, but I have the girl now who goes to kindergarten too, but doesn’t speak. She knows how to speak Arabic and Swedish but, in the kindergarten, no one talks to her.⁶⁴ (Laila)

She wrote that her son “suffered a lot” and this went on until he started to master Swedish. It was, she wrote, as though he lost the ability to talk altogether, regardless of language: “At first, my son became almost mute, he didn’t distinguish between Arabic and Swedish anymore.”

By the time she was writing, her son’s situation had improved and, according to my interpretation, that was because he had started to engage with the Swedish language, as explained by his mother earlier in the text. When writing, however, this mother was experiencing yet another, similar frustration because her daughter had started preschool “but doesn’t speak.” She explained that her daughter “knows Arabic and Swedish” but “in the preschool, no one talks to her.” According to the practitioners, Laila wrote, her daughter had a speech impediment, which they told her “every day”:

That’s why every day they tell us that the girl is suffering from a speech impediment, but we tell them that she talks, and we know that no one plays with her. I don’t know how many years my children will have to suffer until they can speak Arabic and Swedish.⁶⁵ (Laila)

⁶⁴ بالأول أبني تقريباً صار مثل الأخرس لأنو ما بقى يميز بين العربي والسويدي هلق أبني صار وضعو أحسن بس عندي البننت هلق بتروح على الروضة بس ما بتحكي هي بتعرف تحكي عربي وسويدي بس بالروضة محد يحكي معها.

⁶⁵ مشان هيك كل يوم بخبرونا أنو البننت بتعاني من الصم ونحننا منقلان أنو بتحكي ونحننا منعرف أنو محد يلعب معا أنا ما بعرف كم سنة رح يضلو ولادي بتعزبو لحتا يحسنو يحكو عربي وسويدي.

Laila resisted the practitioners' opinion that her daughter had a speech impediment, and said to them "that she talks, but in preschool no one plays with her." She was clearly critical that no other children played with her daughter and she mentioned it in relation to the girl's lack of language skills. This mother's perception of preschool was that, for varying reasons and over different periods of time, it hindered children's language development. She spoke of years to come without any prospect of her children learning any language, neither Arabic nor Swedish. She singled out Swedish as particularly difficult to learn, partly because she and her children lacked opportunities to practice it with native Swedish speakers.

Unlike most of the other parents' writings, Laila's text lacked any feelings of hope, gratitude or fascination regarding the benefits of Swedish preschool. She also merged her description of her children's problems with learning Swedish with herself. It was a problem for both the children and "us," including herself. She did express agency in relation to herself, but not with regard to the children. The children were ascribed agency at home, where they could speak, but not in preschool. In preschool they were mute, suffered, did not speak and did not play.

Laila seemed to be aware of the state preschool political discourse about the need to learn language properly, both the new language and the mother tongue. She emphasized that she wanted to highlight this question and gave a fairly lengthy description of it. She voiced a fear that her children would not learn any language, as described in the state discourse where preschool is presented as the necessary tool to counteract such a development. Preschool should support children's language development, in both Swedish and the mother tongue. However, she herself did not perceive preschool to be a place where this kind of support was provided. According to her own experience, preschool could make her children unable to speak any language, which was the opposite of what is stated in the preschool policy texts. She had used her own agency in the preschool and intervened by explaining to the practitioners that, despite their view of the situation, her daughter was talking. She was probably referring to her daughter talking at home. Thus, she had tried to demonstrate her agency in relation to preschool, but this was not successful. Laila's perception of preschool seemed to be that it did not live up to the goals of teaching children language skills. In spite of this, she was not questioning whether the children should be in preschool at all, but she was clearly stating that the situation she and her children were in made her frustrated and gave little hope of a prosperous future, due to the lack of language skills.

Because it's a very difficult language for us to learn and, even when we do, sometimes we stay at home, we forget because we don't get enough practice.

The Swedes hardly ever talk at work or when they live next door. I don't know if one day we will ever be able to speak Swedish properly.⁶⁶ (Laila)

There was no description of change or transformation in Laila's text about language learning, and there was no hope that preschool could add value to her or her family's life.

Another mother, Sara, who had a son, instead questioned the need to learn Swedish at all. She described the question of language as important by saying "the question of language is a point I wish to linger on." Her concern was that she could not understand how or why her son must learn, and be dependent on, a language "other than his own." His "own" language was Arabic, which was also Sara's language, while the "other" language was Swedish. She was resisting the state preschool political discourse by questioning its emphasis on learning Swedish as the most important measure of school success and integration:

The question of language is a point I wish to linger on. I wonder how my son will rely on a language other than his own language. I will surely try to help him at home.⁶⁷ (Sara)

When it came to Arabic, presented as her son's language, "his language," she was worried, and wrote: "I will surely try to help him at home." This mother expressed her agency by using the pronoun "I" several times in the text. It was the "I" who wanted to linger, to pose a question, and to teach the child at home.

I interpret her pursuit of a personal voice questioning the state preschool political discourse as indicative of a desire to have agency in society as a whole, i.e., by questioning the preschool policy, she was refusing the categorization of herself and her son as new arrivals with needs. In addition, she used her own agency to support her own ideas where she had the opportunity to do so, at home. She did not express any hopes or expectations that preschool should care for her son's language learning in his mother tongue. It is possible that Sara agreed to take part in this research as yet another way to activate her agency, and to make visible her resistance to the state preschool political discourse.

Was Sara writing change and transformation into her text, or was she not? My interpretation is twofold. On the one hand, it could be interpreted that Sara did not want change, in the sense of her son's need to learn the new language, Swedish. On the other hand, her way of expressing what she would try to help her son with, learning the language he already owns, was a change for her.

⁶⁶ لأنو لغة كثير صعبة حتى أنو منتعلم بس أحياناً منضل بالبيت مننسى لأنو مافي ممارسة السويدين قليل بيحكو بالشغل أو كجيران مابعرف إذا بالأيام القادمة رح نعرف نحكي سويدي منيح.

⁶⁷ موضوع اللغة هو نقطة توقف عندي أنو كيف رح يكون ابني عم يعتمد على لغة غير لغته... بحاول أكيد أنو أساعدو على هاد الموضوع بلبيت.

The preschool's expectation, according to her, was, however, that change is the preferred outcome. In short, she would act to promote the continued learning of Arabic at home, and even though this would mean continuing on a path already set out before coming to Sweden, it was pursuing a perspective not foreseen within the state preschool political discourse. Sara's writing about the here and now in relation to a future was about resistance to the new and protecting the known. This pushed me to interpret her writing as a desire for continuity and no more change.

The following example is the opposite of Sara's view. Rahaf, who also had a son, embraced the state preschool political discourse. Similarly to Sara, she used the pronoun "I" to demonstrate her agency. However, instead of voicing criticism of the issue of learning Swedish in preschool, as Sara did, Rahaf used her voice to affirm the state preschool political discourse. She even encouraged it, and wrote:

I encourage learning Swedish in preschool. It's a beautiful thing for children to learn the Swedish language at a young age. I would like my children to learn Swedish in preschool.⁶⁸ (Rahaf)

It was as though this mother used her agentic role when taking part in the research as a way to fulfill a dream and a positive fantasy about her children's future. She was expressing her desire that what was promised by the state preschool political discourse would become real through her writing. However, she did not mention Arabic, the mother tongue. Her writing was an assertion of the potential invested in learning Swedish.

Agency as a Matter of Language Proficiency: Talk or Understand

In their writings, four parents marked a difference between *to talk* and *to understand* when describing their children's progress in relation to language proficiency in both Arabic and Swedish. These parents were Rana, Imad, Lina and Laila. The verbs they used, *to talk* and *to understand*, symbolized a virtual movement. I argue that this is a movement that, in these parents' writings, transformed the child from a beginner learner into an advanced learner.

The parents used the verb "talk,"⁶⁹ when they referred to other children and adults speaking to their children, i.e. people at the advanced level of language proficiency. These, whom I call speakers, knew the language, they had mas-

⁶⁸ أنا أشجع تعليم اللغة السويدية في مرحلة الروضة هاد شيء جميل للأطفال تعليم اللغة السويدية من الصغر أنا أحب أن يتعلم أبنائي اللغة السويدية في مرحلة الروضة.
⁶⁹ يحكي، يتكلم.

tered it. Those who *speak* were the empowered ones, in the context of language learning, and this could be in either Arabic or Swedish, or both. The new arrival children on the other hand, were assigned the task of understanding. The verb “understand”⁷⁰ was used in the context of the refugees’ timeline of being in Sweden, to refer to those children who were trying to grasp the new reality and learn the new language, the beginners. The verb *understand* was never used in relation to what the parents defined as the child’s own language, Arabic. Hence, to understand became similar to being in a listener’s position where one did not understand. In that sense, one could say that, with these explicit references to language acquisition, the parents regarded their children as being in a subordinate position; they listened but could not understand the language they heard because they had not mastered the linguistic and cultural codes necessary for a speaker.

The opposite was true for Arabic. According to these parents, their children “speak” Arabic, they did not occupy the listener’s position as they did in relation to Swedish. The children were able to master the Arabic language, they could speak it, because they had mastered the linguistic and cultural codes. Because the children could speak, they were active language users themselves.

Taken together, this shows that the parents themselves placed the new arrivals, and particularly the children, in the listener’s position; they had to understand the linguistic and cultural codes before speaking. There seemed to be a power relation implicit in the verb “speak” that was linked to majority and mainstream language. The children gradually became Swedish “speakers,” when learning the language in preschool. Since the children learned Arabic at home, the idea was that they became masters of that language too. The meaning constructed was that, with time, children became empowered via their language learning. This is in line with the state preschool political discourse, but expressed in a different way and from an insider’s position. In constituting these meanings about language acquisition and language proficiency, the parents were indirectly excluding themselves from the positive change their children were supposed to encompass. Only one mother in the whole corpus of data explicitly addressed her own language acquisition in Swedish. She referred to it as a problem, because she could not see how she would be able to master the Swedish language when there were no situations during which she could practice it. She wanted to meet with more Swedes, but did not know how to accomplish that.

Agency through Learning Daily Practices

I now focus on another form of learning that was highlighted in several of the parents’ writings. This kind of learning is concerned with how preschool

⁷⁰ يفهم.

teaches children about everyday practices: to eat on time, to be disciplined about time, to put their clothes and shoes on and take them off, to provide teaching materials, to get drawings made by the children, and so on. Some parents appreciated the ways in which preschool paid attention to food preferences and cared about cleanliness. Such practices were regarded as positive aspects by the parents and they described how this made the children strong and strengthened their self-confidence. It was interesting to analyze how the parents positioned themselves in relation to these positive practices in their writings. Theoretically, they could have been regarded as a threat to their status as parents, a theme which will be discussed in the next chapter. I focus now on Lobna and Sonya, who wrote about learning daily practices, and how they positioned themselves in relation to these practices.

Lobna lived in a predominantly Swedish neighborhood and had placed her daughter in a nearby preschool. She was specific in her appreciation of how the preschool taught the children in general, and her daughter in particular, for example how to put her shoes on and off, to eat by herself and to develop self-confidence. She wrote:

Whenever children draw something or make something with their hands, they gather up all her paintings and drawings and let me take them home, which has a really good effect on my child's self-confidence. They teach her how to put her shoes on and take them off and also how to eat on her own. They also respect our wish to eat only Halal food. When I come to pick her up, they tell me how well she ate, and slept properly.⁷¹ (Lobna)

Lobna did not refer to herself and her daughter as a collective; rather, she was stating her own agency as an individual. For example, she wrote about how the family moved to "my" house.⁷² Hence, she treated her daughter as a separate individual who learned and grew with the help of others. She was explicit about the fact that "they," the preschool practitioners, taught children in general, and particularly her daughter, a number of daily practices. She moved between writing about children as a collective and her own daughter in particular when describing the teaching and learning, and how it empowered the children, her daughter included, and strengthened their self-confidence. This is an example of how "they," preschool practitioners, were perceived positively by this new arrival family. Lobna also made a distinction between "people" in preschool, who were treating her daughter beautifully and the "people" in the residential area where she lived, who were mostly Swedes. She wrote:

⁷¹ لما ترسم شي او تعمل شي بخلو كلوحات وبحطو صوراعليهن وبيعطوني اياهن للبيتوهاد الشهي بزيد بالولد ثقو بنفسو بعلموا كيف تلبس بوطا وتشلحو لجالا وتاكل لجالا. وبيحترمو موضوع الاكل الحلال وبيخبروني لما احي اخدا انو اكلت اليوم منيح او ما منيح نامت كثير او شوي.

⁷² لما انتقلت عبيتي.

First, my daughter is three years old, and when I moved to my house I put her in a kindergarten near where we live. It was very new and really clean and the workers' treatment was beautiful, even though they scared me because I'm living in an area with mostly Swedes. However, they treated us fantastically well, and were very clean.⁷³ (Lobna)

The fact that Lobna lived in an area "with mostly Swedes" caused her to feel scared, but this fear was induced by others she described as "they." Thus, Lobna's use of the term "they" opened up different possible interpretations of how this pronoun could produce multiple meanings. As Lobna said, "they," i.e. the preschool's practitioners, were an asset for the children in preschool. This made the mother and her child look passive. She also wrote that: "they scared me," "they give them [drawings] to me," "they inform me," "they take them [the children] out," "they feed them," "they teach them," "they tell her." This use of transitive verbs positioned Lobna as less active in her parental role when her daughter was at preschool. At the same time, she acknowledged that "they" strove to include her as a parent by means of these initiatives that she did not control. However, the passive voice produced by the use of transitive verbs was also complemented with her own active voice.

Like several other parents presented in this chapter, she was clearly writing herself as an agent in the text. Her agency was also of a specific kind: she was the "I," as in eye, an observing position surveilling her child's learning progress, aided by the preschool. She was, thus, also indirectly constituting her own agentic status by presenting herself as the one who observes and knows what is going on.

In a similar way, Sonya wrote herself into her text as an observing eye, thus supporting the children's collective identity in preschool as something not directly involving herself. Like Lobna, she related this observing position to talking about daily routines and practices. This could be interpreted as meaning that this position enabled these parents to hand their parental authority over to the preschool. It was a strategy for not feeling threatened by their children's new experiences, in which they were not directly involved.

My interpretation is that Lobna's text and use of pronouns reflected her own process of negotiating her parental position in relation to the preschool's role in her child's life. She was not using time or describing a transformation, as was done by several parents in this chapter. Still, she managed to balance her parental role with the preschool's responsibility and she constructed a positive story about it. Learning daily routines and practices was an important ingredient in this process. It could also be, as Lobna exemplified, that the parents criticized how daily routines were played out. Lobna described how feeding her daughter fish on a warm day made the girl vomit. Other parents might

⁷³ اول شي بنتي عمرا تلت سنين لما انتقلت عبيتي حطيتا بداغيز جنب البيت كان جديد كثير ونضيف صراحة وتعامل الناس اللي في حلو مع انه الناس خوفوني لاني ساكنه بمنطقة كلا سويديين بس صراحة تعاملن كان بجنن ونضاف كثير عالولاد.

react when the preschool was considered too permissive and, for example, allowed the children to get themselves dirty. This provoked critical remarks. Overall, however, the negative accounts regarding these issues were outnumbered by the positive ones. Preschool's role in teaching daily routines is not highlighted much by the preschool political discourse, even though it was clearly an important concern for the new arrival families. Play, however, is considered by the state preschool political discourse to be part of preschool's daily activities and is accorded importance.

Parent's Writings about Language and the State Preschool Political Discourse

The agency used by the parents to make their children feel safe at preschool before acquiring language and communication skills can be interpreted as a way to not only take part in, but also make oneself an active contributor to, the process of integration via preschool. With the exceptions of Laila and Sara, the parents expressed such an activity in many ways, and more or less explicitly; several of them seemed to want to take part in a discursive and social practice to which they could make a contribution. To be at preschool with their children was an expression of wanting to be included by having a role in society. They were not at preschool to protect their children from potential harm inflicted by the preschool; rather, they were there to facilitate their integration and language learning. These parents constituted themselves as mediators between the Arabic they knew and had mastered and the Swedish they did not know and had not mastered, in order to give their children opportunities to master both. Hence, the parents' actions supported Swedish integration politics; while they did not themselves master the Swedish language, they could be in preschool with their children during the period of time needed for them to adjust and feel comfortable.

It is interesting to notice that the parents with crying children were the ones who activated their own agency to the greatest extent, which indirectly implied the agency of the children. The children's crying made their parents stay with them in preschool. Laila, on the other hand, voiced a discourse of failure and despair that came with the inability to learn Swedish, which is also part of the state preschool political discourse. I would not say that she was resisting this discourse; rather, she did not see any positive outcomes from it. There was also an example of a parent expressing resistance to, and questioning, the state preschool political discourse. Sara was clearly critical, at the same time as she was constituting herself as agentic in the social and discursive practice of which she was part. My last example, about Rahaf, shows that she was making

an affirmative statement in which she agreed with the important role that language is given in the state preschool political discourse, and hoped that it would materialize in her children's lives.

This chapter shows that the parents were aware of the importance of their role in helping their children to acquire the new language. Even though they did not write about their own language learning, they were active, to various degrees, in their children's linguistic development. At home, they tried to preserve their mother tongue and the cultural extensions that went with it, while at the same time they facilitated the learning of the new language by acquiring it themselves, or at least by being aware of it and discussing it with the preschool practitioners. However, the parents did not write about fears concerning their children not learning Arabic or about Arabic culture while at preschool. They did not seem to be concerned about developing it in the same way as the state preschool political discourse is.

However, the parents did express concerns that are also addressed in the state preschool political discourse about the huge importance of new arrival immigrants learning Swedish. This was in spite of the fact that this discourse, since the early 2000s, has not regarded new arrival immigrants, and what they bring with them, in a positive light. The medical discourse and the discourse about the child's best interests were in some cases superordinate to the parents' own evaluations and observations. While the parents' preferences regarding specific foods were respected, their perceptions of their children's language development were not considered. A possible interpretation of this is that the preschool acknowledged diversity when it came to the families' cultural identity, but held an expert attitude about the parents' role in their children's language development. Preschool's expertise in matters related to language learning is well supported in the state political discourse about preschool having the best knowledge about what is best for the child.

The parents were aware of their being positioned as the other, by not mastering Swedish, and they were investing time and energy into meeting the expectations to integrate into Swedish society and gain acceptance and recognition. When expressing resistance to the discourse, they were also exercising agency, which highlights that the position of being a passive recipient of the new was not an option. I have also made clear in this chapter that the personal agency expressed by the pronoun "I" was more prevalent in the home environment than in relation to preschool. At home, the parents were empowered to enable their agency via the use of the Arabic language, and when in preschool the children were empowered and enabled via learning the Swedish language. This constituted different agentive roles for parents and children in the same family to negotiate and develop, in relation to the before, the now and the future. In addition, time played a key role in the parents' writings. Time was used to measure how long it had been since they arrived in Sweden, first went to preschool, began adapting to the new environment, started to learn the language, develop social skills and find friends. Time also emerged

in their comments about conserving ties with their original culture, and expressing uncertainty about the future.

When approaching my data from the viewpoint of language learning, I was able to detect the discourses that the informants used to describe their perceptions of Swedish preschool. In most cases, they picked up on themes that also exist in the state preschool political discourse, including: language as a tool to help children make friends and develop social skills through socialization, preschool's use of various methods to support the child's linguistic development, the idea that segregated schools cause language development stagnation and regression, the importance of parents' involvement, and how language equips children with the necessary skills for future success. The role of learning through performing daily practices at preschool is scarcely mentioned in the state preschool political discourse, where it is recognized as a starting point for teaching the Swedish language. However, for the new arrival parents, this was acknowledged as an important part of how they perceived preschool.

In sum, when examining representations of social actors in the parents' discursive practice, many verbs were used to underline their own agency and to demonstrate their children's participation by realizing them as social actors through pronouns, nouns and names. They used local and temporal adverbs abundantly, which can be interpreted as an indication of the importance they ascribed to their circumstances. For example, the ways in which the informants used verbs and pronouns show how a certain place put them in the position of agent/patient. While at home, the use of I/my was more frequent, they/me/us were applied more when the parents found themselves in an institutional setting. However, the same does not apply to their children; s/he were frequently used pronouns when representing the children as social actors both at preschool and at home. The parents did not use the practice of excluding the practitioners from their writings by means of backgrounding or suppression. Agency became an inherent part of the themes that constituted their writing about their perceptions of Swedish preschool.

Chapter 6: New Arrival Immigrant Families' Discourses about Belonging and Preschool

The last chapter examined the discourses connected to language learning in preschool through the perceptions of new arrival parents. Developing language skills in the host society's official language is considered to be an attainable criterion for developing a sense of belonging. In this chapter, I look at discourses that the parents used to express their sense of belonging and non-belonging. I examined seven accounts altogether. They varied in length and were selected because they contained topics related to movement and emotions, connected to the space(s) that my informants chose to include in their writings. The informants did not write explicitly about belonging; rather, they wrote about *home*, *here and there*, *preschool* and the different feelings they ascribed to those places. By conducting a content analysis, I looked for more themes showing how the informants created a sense of belonging both inside and outside the language/culture discourses and how they used their agency to belong and to resist belonging.

Belonging is a relational concept; one belongs to/with something or someone. Therefore, the focus of this chapter is on how the parents perceive their relation to preschool, to their original and host societies, and to their children. This was made possible by analyzing their writings using various linguistic tools such as deixis, in order to understand how they positioned themselves in relation to the place/culture from which they had departed and in which they lived at the moment of writing. Belonging presupposes boundaries, which allow for inclusion and exclusion. The informants' use of adjectives clarified their feelings about the inclusion and exclusion they experienced, which are subject to boundary making and boundary breaking. Emotions were illustrated by the use of adjectives (glad, sociable, cooperative, safe, unsafe, comfortable, better, etc.) and these emotions expressed how the new arrival parents had experienced their children's preschool. This experience, both negative and positive, was often tainted by previous experiences they carried within them. This micro-level analysis allowed the informants to show how they used their agency to adopt or discard the discourses utilized by the state preschool polit-

ical discourse; for example, integration and belonging, thus revealing the dialectical relationship between discourse as text, discursive practice and social practice.

“Here” and “In Our Country”: Where are the New Arrivals?

“Here” and “there” are powerful deictic place adverbs, indicating how the speaker positions her/himself, and describes the proximity and distance to the subject s/he is talking about (Brewer & Harris, 1974). I did not ask my informants to write about how it was in Syria, but in spite of this many of them chose to draw attention to this aspect of their experience. By remembering how it was in their home country, they were calling on memories that also stirred up emotions and pulled on various strings of attachment that tied them to what they had left behind. In their accounts, the informants expressed a dual belonging, their own when they wrote about “in our country” and their children’s belonging when they wrote about them as part of the wider community of children, doing belonging in the context of preschool.

The informants’ use of place adverbs could lead me to conclude that they wanted to show the differences that existed between how preschool worked in Sweden and in Syria, which of course they did. It could also be a way for the parents to demonstrate their multiple experiences and involvement in their children’s education, thus highlighting their agency through observing variations between the places. However, “here,” which is the adverb referring to the place that is closest to the speaker, was not countered by “there,” which implies distance. The informants often used “in our country,” or simply “Syria,” instead of “there.” An interpretation of this could be that the informants wanted to bring the distant geographical place that is contained in the word “there” closer to themselves, thus highlighting a continuing connection with home, or perhaps an allusion to being only temporarily “here” for the sake of their children.

Sweden for the Future

Rasha is a mother of three children, uneducated, born into the Syrian lower middle class, and she differentiated herself from others by referring to her wealth. This was clearly reflected in her writing and written language skills. She wrote, for example, about her eldest daughter going to a private school in Syria, which was a status marker that made her different from the poor majority. This was confirmed by another informant, who wrote that only a few could afford private preschools in Syria. Rasha was the only mother who saw noth-

ing extra in the Swedish preschool system. She stated clearly, right at the beginning of her text, that coming to Sweden was about her “children’s future.” This could imply that, in war-torn Syria, the future seemed bleak and that her children could do better in Sweden than if they stayed back home, and also that Sweden could become home for her children. Rasha’s statement about the reason for coming to Sweden showed that she did not include herself in this futuristic project. One possible explanation for why she excluded herself from the Swedish experience is that she was trying to say that she herself did not belong in Sweden. Coming to Sweden for the sake of her children’s future might imply a sacrificial act, highlighting what she might have left behind.

As Rasha proceeded in her writing to mark the difference between Sweden and Syria, she avoided using country names; rather, she used place adverbs: “here” and “in our country.” She did not contrast *here* by using *there* (i.e. referring to Syria), but instead added the possessive pronoun “our” before the word country to demonstrate clearly where she belonged. This could imply that here (Sweden) was not a place where she felt that she belonged, or at least identified with. Place is a sociocultural marker and, by belonging to one place, Rasha made it clear that she did not belong to the other place. Wording and word meaning, as explained by Fairclough, show how agency is employed through the use of language. Again, and again, Rasha made a consistent effort in her writing to polarize the two places of her experience; the place in which she was living at the moment of writing and the place she had left but which was still hers, as expressed by her use of the collective possessive pronoun “our.” This polarization referred to schools, teaching methods and relations. Rasha stated that schools in Sweden and schools in Syria did not differ much, and used the adverb “frankly” to state that her experience did not match her expectations. Whether she expected schools to be better or worse in Sweden than in Syria is unknown, but she made a point of stressing their similarity. She affirmed that “here” children have many more ways to play at school and she portrayed the Swedish school as a place where a child played all s/he wanted; it was more of a place of leisure than a place of learning, as schools were “in our country”.

Rasha’s observation shows that, in her view, play and learning were two separate activities. In her country, “learning” happened in the school milieu while “playing” did not. Her experience in Sweden showed that both activities could happen in the same place. While Rasha stated at the beginning of her writing that she did not find a big difference between schools in Sweden and Syria, she did write later on that there was only one thing that existed “here” that was different from “our country.” This was the student’s relationship with the teacher. Thus, she seemed to contradict herself, or it could mean that at the beginning she could not discern any differences between schools in the two countries, but that later on she learned that the student/teacher relationship was very different in Sweden from what it was in Syria. This supports the transformational aspect of the theory used in this study, and that the individual is

developing consciousness about his/her situation in relation to the broader context.

Rasha explained that “in our country we don’t call the teacher by his name,” and that it is considered disrespectful to omit titles. She wrote that: “we respect him by calling him Ms. or Mr.⁷⁴, whilst ‘here’ he [the child] calls the teacher by his given name and considers him a human being, (one) of the family.”⁷⁵ This reveals where Rasha positioned herself. She wrote that “we” respected the teacher, while “here” the child addressed the teacher by given name only. When talking about “our country,” she included herself by using the first-person plural personal pronoun “we,” thus placing herself in a collective that was geographically and perhaps mentally distant. But when talking about “here,” she used the masculine third-person singular personal pronoun “he” to refer to the child. She was not talking specifically about her own children when describing the situation “here.” Rather, she spoke about *the child, the boy* and *he*. Another informant who placed moral value “in our country” was Iman. She wrote that respect and obedience were among the most important values *we* learned “in our country.” This happened when she expressed strong criticism of schooling, that education taught the child his rights but did not balance them by teaching him to respect and obey his elders.

Rasha’s description not only reflected the cultural differences regarding the concept of respect, but one could argue that it was also a reflection of the status of being a teacher in different cultures. The teacher “here” was considered a normal “human being,” who has a name and could easily be a family member. The teacher in her country was distant, and this distance between him/her and the student was marked by the use of titles. In the same sentence, she referred again to her socioeconomic status which was stated earlier when she wrote about “private schools.” No public schools in Syria would allow the use of English honorifics *Ms.* or *Mr.* as a way to address teachers, because the nationalist ideology in these schools was far too strong to allow any foreign linguistic influences. Only private schools offer such liberties, which the parents choose by paying large sums of money, precisely because these schools introduce the child to foreign languages early.

I interpret this not only as difference between “here” and “in our countries,” but also as a generational and ideological difference. Children “here” adhere to egalitarian and democratic values which are anchored in the state preschool political discourse and are underlined in the various policy documents, such as the preschool curriculum. This could hardly exist under the authoritarian system “in our country.” Rasha recognized that calling the teacher by his/her name created a sense of belonging, a family-like structure between the child and the teacher. But this sense of belonging went against the ethical values of

⁷⁴ To clarify for those who do not read Arabic, the terms Rasha uses in Arabic are *مس* and *مستر* which are the English terms Miss and Mister.

⁷⁵ Note, she has a dog, which may be the reason for writing “human being.”

respect to which she had become accustomed when growing up in Syria. Ethical values can also be understood as an expression of belonging. However, the different way of being, which the child is taught and exposed to in preschool, seemed to benefit the children, and some of the parents were very aware of this effect. Iman, for example, mentioned that, when comparing her child to other children “in our country,” she found her daughter to be stronger and older and more capable of depending on herself for many things, such as dressing and eating.

Rasha touched briefly upon the subject of discrimination, regarding it to be another difference between schools in Sweden and Syria. It was unclear how she found this out, but she seemed to have had direct experience of it because she wrote: “for me, I also find that there is discrimination between an Arab or foreign child and a Swedish child.”

More Time at Home in Syria

The phrases “here” and “in our country” also appeared in other informants’ writing. When writing about preschool in Sweden, Boshra said: “this doesn’t exist in Syria.” Whether by “this” she was referring to open preschool or to preschool practices is unclear. The contrast between Sweden and Syria continued in her description and she told us about bringing up children in Syria. The child in Syria is late in socializing with the outside world, she explained, and “in our country” the child spent more time with his/her mother and this strengthened the bond between them. Boshra did not reflect much about why children in Sweden go to preschool, or whether she regarded taking the child to preschool as weakening the bond with his/her parents. However, she saw both the negative and the positive side of each experience. She described how the teaching methods “here” were better and easier, focusing on the brain’s functions. She also underlined how a whole system of organizing the child’s sleeping, eating, playing, learning and visiting outdoor places had been put in place, and that this organization of the child’s daily life outside the home did not exist in Syria.

Sara also described the differences in the ways the child was socialized “here” and “in our country.” She explained the reason why children were late in becoming sociable in Syria; in her opinion, it was related to the fact that they spent long periods of time with their parents, which meant that they needed more time to connect with new people and things. Preschool, in her opinion, allowed the child to encounter “many new things.” Children in the informants’ country of origin belonged to the home sphere with their parents, while here they were made to belong to a larger context through preschool. I interpret their writings as an indication of change in the parents’ situation. It meant that the mothers back there were tied to the child at home, while here, thanks to preschool, they were freer to do other things outside the home, to

belong but not only to the home. No parent wrote about a need for their children to spend more time in preschool.

Becoming Sociable

Do children do belonging differently from adults? Are preschool children aware of the concept of belonging, or is it something we develop as we grow older, start complicating life and acquire multiple identities? Belonging is dual, we belong with and belong to. This difference in preposition might enlighten us as to how children and adults do belonging. While belonging *with* reveals a form of dependency or is an expression of coexistence, belonging *to* demonstrates a person's active choice to identify with something.

Preschool as a Gate to the Outside World

Becoming sociable is a recurring theme in the informants' writings. According to them, becoming sociable happened through play with other children and being at preschool. Boshra wrote earlier about how preschools "here" allowed the child to establish relationships with the outside world while, from her experience with preschool, Rasha captured "play" as one of the biggest differences between (pre)schools in Syria and Sweden. Playing is an inclusive practice that is used by preschools as a complex super-tool for teaching by exploring, developing the child's skills, and including each child in the group. By playing, the child is enabled to belong *with* the community of children (social belonging) and *to* the preschool and its activities, practices and values (political and organizational belonging). Play becomes a third space that allows the child to connect home and school (Yahya and Wood, 2017).

Boshra described preschool as a place for both her and her child (she was talking about open preschool). She wrote that she felt her child was able to become sociable and was encouraged to cooperate and share his toys with other children. Boshra's child attended an open preschool, which allowed parents to accompany their children and stay with them. This meant that the parents got to meet other parents and talk with them while being with their children. The preschool was a place that allowed both Boshra and her son to become sociable. Her involvement did not stop at the entrance to the preschool, she was physically present with her child and able to observe what was happening around him. A sense of belonging was observed by Boshra when she pointed to the spirit of cooperation and toy exchange among the children.

Sara also stressed the same point as Boshra when she explained that the child in Syria was late in becoming sociable and the reason was that s/he was tied to his/her parents for a longer period of time, which meant that he would distance himself from new things and new people, and this led the child to be late in developing relations to new people and things. The preschool was again

understood by Sara as a place where the child was allowed to know about other things and places than just the family.

The Attraction of Normality and Inclusion

In her writing, Rana highlighted the importance of living a normal social life and, because they lacked a wider family in Sweden, Rana and her husband looked to the preschool as a substitute, where the larger community of children and playing were seen as a remedy to save her child from feeling lonely and unrooted and to give her a sense of belonging. She wrote explicitly about “living a normal social life.” She described her daughter’s life in Syria as living in a good social milieu in spite of being away from her dad, and that she was surrounded by a family who embraced her. Belonging in Sweden was initially about reunion with her father (smaller family), while in Syria it was about living in an appropriate social milieu and being part of a bigger family (grandparents, aunts and small cousins she could be with). Once she was living with her father again, Rana described her daughter’s feelings. She wrote about feeling lonely when they came to Sweden and that the way to deal with her daughter’s loneliness was to try to get her into preschool so she could play with other children.

However, Rana was the same mother who, in the previous chapter, opposed her daughter spending time in preschool talking to Arab children. She asked the preschool staff to separate them and make them integrate as a way to learn the Swedish language and culture. Her idea of belonging was clearly different from that of her daughter. She wanted her daughter to belong culturally and linguistically to the “Swedish” way, while her daughter was more interested in belonging with the girls who spoke her language. The interesting part is that we do not know what language these girls spoke in preschool. Just because they were all Arabs, it does not necessarily follow that they would only speak Arabic as the mother feared. Rana tried hard to create a social milieu in which her daughter could live a normal life. Why was this so important for her? One explanation could be because of the many changes (as quoted above) that they went through prior to arriving in Sweden. Rana did not write in detail about these changes, but one can imagine the uncertainties and threats of a war-ridden existence in which Rana’s longing for normality became the most precious quest. Another explanation is that she did not want her daughter to feel like a stranger and wanted to find continuity in the life that she and her husband had chosen for their daughter. Rana, unlike Rasha, did not write about coming to Sweden as a way to secure her child’s future, and seeking to reestablish normality in her child’s life, after so many disruptions, could be seen as a conscious effort to unburden the child from the implications of being a migrant, an outsider.

Rana took an active role in organizing her daughter’s social life. She was not afraid of asking the practitioners, as mentioned in the previous chapter, to

make her child interact with Swedish girls instead of the Arabic-speaking children. She also got involved in organizing her daughter's birthday party, and convinced her daughter to invite Swedish children as well, not only her Arab friends. At the party, Rana noticed that the Swedish girls were reserved and did not like talking to her daughter and her friends. The boys, meanwhile, were busy with boyish games. A few weeks later, Rana's child was sad because she was not invited to the birthday party of one of the Swedish girls. Rana's quest to give her daughter a normal social life led her to ignore the child's own preferences for company. The daughter found a sense of belonging by playing with Arabic-speaking girls at preschool (being happy, at ease and comfortable), while the mother saw belonging as forcing her child to integrate and bringing the Swedish element into her life, and thus responding to the politics of belonging.

Rana did not ignore the incident of her child not being invited to the Swedish girl's birthday party. Rather, she reflected upon it and compared her own way of making her daughter integrate and belong to that of the Swedish girl's mother, who, according to Rana, did not make the same effort to prevent her child from differentiating between, as she wrote, "us" and "them." We do not really know what the Swedish mother thought, but we do know that Rana "forced" her daughter to invite both Arab and Swedish children to her party. This could indicate that Rana saw integration as a two-way process, that representatives of the mainstream society could also take the initiative and the responsibility to include the other into their lives, and that the burden of integration should not fall on the outsider alone. Being excluded from the party caused a feeling of sadness, but not the loneliness with which her daughter had suffered initially upon her arrival in Sweden. Belonging in Rana's account was not something that just happened; rather, it required action and agency on the part of the new arrivals as well as the natives.

Safe from War but not Safe from the Authorities

Feelings of sadness and loneliness were present in Rana's text. Hiba, meanwhile, further highlighted other emotions that she related to her interactions with mainstream society. She described her life in Sweden as comfortable when she first arrived because, she wrote, there were no "racists," while now she felt that Swedish people did not treat her in the same way due to the increasing number of refugees. Hiba's experience illustrates the existing correlation between immigration and the rise of right-wing ideologies. She explained that the refugee had to be wary of his Swedish neighbor, preschool and school. Hiba ascribed herself the status of a refugee and explained that this position made her feel as though she was being subjected to the scrutiny of the authorities. Hiba was no longer a refugee when she wrote her text, she

had obtained permanent residence papers, but she came to Sweden as a refugee. In her thinking, she was still a refugee and her experience of being watched perpetuated this idea and the feelings of insecurity. Her writing showed that her expectations of life in Sweden did not match her experience. She explained that they had thought they would be safe upon arriving in Sweden. The difference was that they were safe from war but did not feel safe when it came to their children because even when visiting the doctor, if the child was behaving in a way that was a bit different or scared, the doctor suspected that s/he was suffering from a psychological condition because of the parents.

Hiba's feelings, after being comfortable at the beginning, had changed to discomfort, worry and fear. Her initial sense of belonging (feeling comfortable) was disrupted due to racism, which according to her was caused by the increasing number of refugees. She mentioned the topic of racism and how being exposed to it caused feelings of fear and worry to arise. When applying the analysis of word-meaning proposed by Fairclough, what would the potential meaning of such a word be? And why did Hiba choose to word her experience in this way? Other participants mentioned discrimination and racist discrimination, but no one else wrote about racism as explicitly as Hiba did. What is the struggle hidden behind this word? Her wording could signify hostility, feeling unwelcome, being watched, or feeling threatened. Again, other informants were aware of themselves being the other and the outsider, but none of them labeled themselves as refugees. Hiba saw a correlation between being a refugee and the manifestation of racist attitudes. She felt that Swedes were looking at her as the different other, who had to watch out for representatives of authority as well as individuals from the majority society. She regarded her children as being in peril and her role as a parent to be threatened.

Hiba talked about a difference in treatment when being a lone refugee among Swedes and when being one of many. On the one hand, she did not seem to feel a sense of belonging with people with whom she shared similar experiences of war/fleeing, origins or language. But, on the other hand, she described herself as one of many refugees. She experienced her access to a safe and normal life in Sweden as being impeded by various gatekeepers, the neighbor watching her doorstep and the school and medical workers examining her children. Why did she feel that she was being watched by these institutions? The preschool's attempts to make parents more involved in their children's education could be experienced as an intrusion into private life, as could the doctor's unsolicited health check-ups. The reason could also be that she did not share Swedish values and way of living. Preschool, school, doctor's clinics and common areas shared with neighbors were spaces in which she felt controlled and threatened.

Because Hiba experienced her belonging as difficult, she clung more to her own children as her only belongings and saw the society to which she had fled as trying to take them away. I describe her children as belongings, both in the

material sense of “owning” them and in the figurative sense of being a place to which she herself belonged. Hiba ended her account by wishing that “they” would make the laws a bit lighter so her family could feel a “bit safe.” Hiba experienced Swedish laws as too strict and as preventing her from feeling fully safe. Initially, she referred to racism as the cause of her feeling unsafe, while by the end she felt that the whole legislative system was hindering her from feeling safe and was threatening her traditional parenting role. In order to belong, Hiba wished that the system would change to accommodate her views on parenting and to enable her to interact with the society’s different institutions without experiencing these feelings of fear and preoccupation.

Rumors: The Migrants’ Path from Unknowing to Knowing

Marah’s feelings were the opposite of Hiba’s. She was really glad about the treatment her children were getting at their preschool, and even described an improvement in their “psychological health” thanks to the preschool activities. Prior to arriving in Sweden, her children had not attended any preschool in Lebanon, where she had resided after fleeing Syria. Marah did not arrive directly from the war in Syria, she and her family went through a transitional phase in a neighboring country. This had meant prolonging their unstable situation, which could have had an effect on her children’s psychological health.

Marah, interestingly, mentioned hearing “rumors” about preschool being a place where infectious diseases circulate, but her experience confirmed that these were just rumors and that the care her children received was “excellent.” Her use of the word “rumors” could imply that she knew beforehand that they were false pieces of information, but it also meant that she was asking others about their experiences and investigating the preschool situation before sending her children there. However, the rumors spread by others about it being a dangerous place for their health did not prevent her from sending them there. Marah did not mention where she had heard these rumors, so we do not get to know whether it was from other parents or from the Arab community. Still, this shows engagement and a strong agentic attitude on her part; inquiring about the nature of preschool and if it was a suitable place for her children is an expression of the desire to belong, by getting directly involved in their integration. Belonging for Marah was demonstrated through the improvement in her children’s psychological health, and recognizing that the preschool was a safe place for them to be.

Other informants also wrote about rumors. Lina, for example, had heard rumors about racial discrimination which made her fearful about sending her daughter to preschool, but at the end of her text she wrote that “after all” her daughter was not treated any differently from Swedish children. This “after

all” could be interpreted as meaning that Lina’s suspicions about discriminatory treatment lasted a long time before they were proven wrong. It could also mean that she was watching very closely how her daughter’s daily life at preschool was unfolding.

Where did these rumors come from? And what purpose did they serve? Lobna, for instance, said that people made her feel scared about sending her child to preschool. This shows that Lobna had asked others about the preschool situation. These others could be her compatriots but also Swedes, since she lived in a predominantly Swedish area. What is important here is that the parents did not just trust the system blindly. They asked others in their surroundings and gathered information, which could be proven true or false, to be able to navigate their new reality.

On the other hand, Iman and Imad had already investigated the situation in Sweden even before coming to the country. While still in her own country, Iman had watched a TV program that talked about the school experience in Denmark so “we could make use of it in the Arab countries.” It is unknown whether Iman already had coming to Sweden in mind at that time, but she watched the program and it painted a “beautiful” picture in her “imagination,” as she wrote, about schools and preschools. She came to Sweden with this picture in mind and her experience showed an appreciation of the way her child was cared for in preschool. This picture helped her to navigate and be prepared for the preschool experience. Thanks to this beautiful picture in her mind, which she actively painted by exposing herself to the program, she was preparing herself for the experience of belonging.

Imad wrote that, prior to coming to Sweden, he did not study anything about Swedish society but that his impression of it was formed by what he was told by other Arabs who had immigrated to Sweden and returned to Syria for a visit. He got to know, for instance, that the society “there,” that is in Sweden, took great care of children, transporting them from home to preschool to provide the parents with comfort. He added that “of course, we heard these stories before coming here,” but that being here had proved them to be different from what “they see.” Imad’s and other informants’ writings show how rumors and pre-acquired information were used as a means to do what was right for their children and to help them integrate and belong to the new society.

These accounts about hearing stories and rumors show that these families asked questions, were curious and keen to learn about their new country. Being new arrivals meant that they had not yet mastered the language, and what they learned came from sources who spoke their own language or the dominant language, which in the latter case could also lead to misunderstandings and misconceptions. The sources of their information and rumors were seldom specified, but they were part of a new arrival families’ network which helped them to navigate in Sweden regardless of whether the rumors were fake or true. The rumors and the experiences attached to them empowered the parents,

made them active agents who were able to evaluate and reevaluate their own and others' experiences of belonging and being part of Swedish society.

The Child's Belonging: A Threat to Parental Authority, or Not?

The preschool state political discourse encourages practices that help the child to develop a sense of belonging to preschool as a place, to the child community, and also to society as a whole, by preparing him/her to be a responsible citizen possessing democratic values. The tasks undertaken by preschool to ensure the accomplishment of these desired outcomes do not always pass unquestioned by the parents. Coming from different cultures where the child is regarded as a private concern limited to his/her immediate family alone, some of the informants felt that preschool and other institutions took far too much interest in their children. This could cause them to feel threatened and fearful, and the preschool state political discourse has shown an awareness of this.

Obstacles to Belonging

Hiba, as shown above, expressed a desire to see less involvement from the legislative side with regard to her children and their upbringing. As mentioned earlier, Hiba regarded herself as a refugee, and being a refugee meant that she had an obligation to respect the laws and regulations in her country of asylum. By expressing such a desire, she was negotiating the terms of her position as a refugee; instead of disobeying the law, she was asking the lawmakers to show more flexibility. Hiba wrote that she was very afraid that one of her children "would fall into (the hands?) of the racist women" working at preschool and that, if anything happened to them, they would take her children away from her. She wrote that she was constantly thinking about them. Hiba's fears led her to paint the presumed racist women as pits into which her children could fall, and she was unable to stop worrying about it due to her fear. Even if her child was enabled to belong, it would be difficult for such a fearful parent as Hiba to belong if she experienced herself as exposed to these constant threats.

Lina's child was prospering in her new social environment, and her sense of belonging was underlined by her love of other people and of playing. Nonetheless, in her writing, Lina contested the boundaries of the political project of the child's belonging: the Swedish model sees the child as a continuous project belonging to the State. The child is a public concern, in contrast to the culture she came from. Lina expressed her annoyance by highlighting two issues that she was struggling with. She wrote about the "attempt to question either the child or the parents to learn how the parents treat the child at home."

It sounded as though she regarded such questioning as being a common practice in which the child was used as an asset or an informant to spy on the parents' way of being parents at home, thus mistrusting their ability to be good parents. It also revealed an opposition between the two places in which the child resided, i.e. preschool and home.

Lina was asked by her daughter's practitioner about the things that her daughter was scared of. Lina said that she did not understand. What part of the question did Lina not understand? Was it the topic of her daughter's fears? Or was it that the question was posed without any context? Her answer of "I don't understand" could reflect defensiveness, especially if Lina was previously aware of the questioning practices conducted by practitioners. The practitioner explained that she meant whether the daughter was, for example, afraid of ghosts because they planned to show a film about a small ghost (Casper)⁷⁶. Lina answered that her daughter was not afraid of ghosts. The practitioner did not stop there but continued further on the same topic, asking the mother about other sources of fear. The mother responded that her daughter was sometimes afraid of the neighbours when she heard their loud voices or heavy footsteps. The practitioner was surprised and asked why, and if the parents were the reason. Lina answered: "Of course not." Lina's dislike of these questions could be explained by the practitioner's insistence on the topic of fear. The reason why she posed this question was initially to find out if showing the film about a ghost would make the girl scared, which was a sign of caring for the child's wellbeing. But her asking further questions even after the mother had answered her inquiry that it would not, caused Lina to feel uncomfortable, as her writings made clear. This feeling was not just supported by the way in which she used reported speech and linguistic features. She also explicitly wrote that she felt it was a "way of questioning which had no reason." Hence, the questions not only aroused feelings of discontent but also a critique, since, from Lina's perspective, they were out of place.

This shows how differences in contextual knowledge about what it means for a new arrival parent to enrol his/her child in preschool, and for the preschool to take on such a responsibility, become a hindrance to the development of trust and belonging. Lina's and other parents' assumptions and mistrust regarding the intentions of the preschool could cause them to miss out on the chance of becoming involved in the activities offered to their children and strengthening their sense of belonging. For the preschool, it is important to acknowledge the differences that children from new arrival families bring with them, in order to communicate in a way that does not create unnecessary obstacles for the families' opportunities to develop a sense of belonging.

⁷⁶ "Casper" is a children's film produced by Universal Pictures, 1995.

Serving the Society in Which One Lives

In contrast to the other informants, Imad wrote that “we are not afraid of the nurturing in preschool.” He explained that each family had its own way of nurturing. He felt safe because he had ensured that his children had the necessary knowledge about his culture and country. Feeling safe in his own identity made him fearless when confronted with new ways of being. He wrote that there were families who were afraid of their children disobeying them, rejecting them or being influenced by Swedish society’s customs. Imad was convinced that human beings are born free, and must remain free even when growing up, and it is necessary to have a developed humanistic culture that allows “us” to respect everything that surrounds “us” and appreciates our efforts. Imad saw belonging as referring not to a single nation or ethnicity or society, but as an effort to be part of the human community, where one’s self-worth is not threatened by differences. Imad argued that, if a child was taught to respect his surroundings and himself, the parents should not fear for him/her, because a person would construct their personality to serve the society in which they live. This shows that belonging requires the will and effort to adapt and to become productive, but also the freedom to choose, as Imad pointed out earlier.

Not Needing Us

Iman wrote that she was afraid for her daughter in the future and that they (the parents) might lose the ability to control, teach and nurture their children in ways that would instill them with morals and knowledge. The future version of her daughter caused her to worry because this future version was connected to the actions they were taking now. The mother wrote about controlling, teaching and nurturing as being her main tasks as a parent, and she was afraid of not being able to perform them because, without their parents’ guidance, children would not acquire the necessary morals and knowledge they needed to become good adults. This was a conclusion to what she had written earlier in her text, where she described how preschool prepared the child to become more independent, and slowly not needing his/her parents, which later on “makes the children stubborn with their own opinions, difficult to control and to deal with.” The idea that her child would slowly not need his parents was a source of preoccupation for this mother, and the use of “slowly” could indicate a fear of not noticing how this development was occurring and thus not being able to control it. This also shows the power of the transformation that the child underwent while at preschool and how this transformation was sometimes, as in Iman’s case, perceived as a loss of control over the child’s development and a threat to her if the child stopped needing her.

This slow transformation started, in Iman’s experience, when her daughter did not need her parents’ opinions anymore and started behaving in ways that

surprised her mother. Still, this transformation made Iman realize that, when comparing her daughter to other children in Syria, she seemed to be stronger and more capable of depending on herself. The ambiguity of her experience could stem from the distinction she made between “here” and “there.” When she was here (Sweden), she was suspicious about what her child was learning at preschool, and when she was there (mentally, in her country) she was proud of her child’s achievements. Her suspicions might arise from her dual position; when she was “here,” she wrote, she felt that her parental role was threatened, but when she used her child’s knowledge to compare her with children in Syria, a feeling of satisfaction or amazement was produced. Indirectly, Iman was also describing how she herself had changed due to her transition from one cultural context to another. Here, she could acknowledge something new and different from her prior experience, and yet she was simultaneously acknowledging her origins.

Not being needed worried Iman, but why would she feel that her daughter’s independence made her less indispensable? It could be the feeling that the child was “slowly” preferring other ways of being that were taught at preschool. Regarding preschool as in opposition to home created a dichotomous and sometimes tension-loaded outlook on the family’s experience of preschool. Seeing preschool as a complementary place to home allowed the child to belong to both places, instead of creating oppositions in which one place eradicated the importance of the other. The parents’ feeling of not being needed could impede their sense of belonging to the new society, especially when my informants often portrayed coming to Sweden as a collective project/act undertaken by the whole family.

Coming to Sweden

Why was the fear of losing their children to Swedish society so prevalent among these parents, and what impact did this fear have on their sense of belonging? Apart from losing one member of the community/family to another culture or way of being, it is important to consider the reason for coming to Sweden in the first place and how this move was expressed by the parents. Several parents wrote about coming to Sweden in the plural form: “we.” There were several empirical examples showing that coming to Sweden was a project undertaken by the whole family. This was expressed by the use of the pronoun *we* or through constructing a prepositional phrase such as “I came with my family to Sweden,” or “I came to Sweden with my husband and I was pregnant.” Thus, coming to Sweden could be understood as a step taken by all member of the family, and also for the good of the whole family. The family members belonged together, and the experienced feelings of fear and worry were perceived as a threat to the family’s cohesion.

One interpretation is that the child’s going over to other ways of being became an expression of betrayal or disloyalty to the initial pact. Many parents

perceived that the changes in their family began in the context of preschool and, while they were afraid of its possible outcomes, they also recognized, and some of them celebrated, that this change was transforming their children and increasing their independence and confidence. The child's sense of belonging in the host society challenged how the family members belonged together, but also the ways in which the parents could accommodate their child's development. The parents' agency became visible in how they negotiated their parental role in the face of the changes and transformations that the family went through when interacting with mainstream society via preschool.

Parents' Writings about Belonging and the State Preschool Political Discourse

This chapter has explored how belonging was expressed and done by both parents and children. It has also explored the obstacles that could hinder the development of a sense of belonging, as well as the premises that strengthened belonging. Belonging is a relational concept, one belongs to/with something or someone. Therefore, the focus of this chapter was on how the parents perceived their relation to preschool, to their original and host societies, and to their children. The chapter used themes that the parents brought up when writing about aspects of their feelings with regard to being in the new country. It also examined the use of place deixis and pronouns to uncover how belonging was embedded in the language and meanings used by the informants and how they asserted agency.

The chapter has shown that the parents expressed several forms of belonging, which were shown partly by contrasting "here" with "in our country."

While, bodily, they and their children belonged here, through coming to Sweden, going to preschool, learning and performing different practices, some parents belonged ethically and morally in their country of origin. This was illustrated by the emotion of fear in relation to upbringing, and the boundaries between private and public concerns. But it also appeared in their writing, through the use of different pronouns, about how things were done in Syria. When referring to some ethical or cultural value, the parents used a *we* from which they excluded their children, because they always contrasted the sentence containing a given moral value with how their child was being taught here. Analyzing the use of adverbial and prepositional phrases reflects the informants' ideational representation of reality and helps us to understand the importance played by their circumstances for their own realization as social actors. The parents' discursive practices also produced an image of social actors through forms of pronominal categorization ("we" for underlining collective identity and actions), and an impersonal portrayal of the practitioners at preschool.

The chapter has also shown that, from what the parents described, the children had a different sense of belonging. For some parents, belonging was not only social, it also complied with the political project of integration and adhering to the prevalent norms. For the children, it was strictly social, it was about being with other children, with no political contamination by “here” and “in our country.” Some children did not even see the difference between home and preschool, while the parents made a clear distinction between the two places. The need to be with other children was not fulfilled by the parents. That is to say, some of the parents, when they realized their children were feeling lonely and sad, did not write about whether they had made any efforts to meet other Arab families who had children of the same age as theirs. They looked for an institution to solve the problem of their children’s solitude. One possible interpretation is that they saw belonging to the expat community of their own country as less important than belonging to mainstream society. However, before getting in touch with a preschool, they actively sought after and acquired information and heard rumors circulating about it, and evaluated how it might possibly affect them and their children.

Children’s play, and preschool as a place for play, were topics that many parents brought up to illustrate their children’s relationship to preschool and how play was used as a tool to facilitate belonging. The parents showed that, through play and looking for playmates for their children, they were also trying to restore normality to their children’s lives. Through play, normal childhood becomes a universal concept that knows no cultural or ethnic differences. Changes and transformations occurring to their children were also captured by many parents. For example, they highlighted how the preschool had made their children more independent, and this transformation, while applauded, did not come without challenges for the parents. The child’s independence and increased self-confidence, which reflected their rooting into the new society or the new way of being, were frequently perceived as stepping away from their parents, not needing them anymore, or as a lack of respect and disobedience. This could sometimes cause mistrust and assumptions about the preschool’s intentions.

Some parents wrote directly about their fear of the authorities. These parents did not feel completely safe and had a feeling of being monitored by the representatives of state institutions (preschool practitioners, doctors, social workers etc.). Some were not fully able to lead a “normal” life because they feared their children would be taken away from them. The parents’ agency in these cases became clearly visible as they tried to defend their positions when they felt they were being suspected of some misconduct. They criticized what they perceived as questioning by the practitioners or monitoring by the law. Bendixen (2020, p. 479) wrote about “existential displacement” where non-belonging, in the case of illegal immigrants, is the result of “a violent mode of governmentality that includes laws, health care structures, and migration management rationalities.” This was clearly shown by the example of Hiba, who

regarded herself as still being a refugee even after legalizing her situation, and felt constrained by the control of her Swedish neighbors, preschool practitioners, pediatrician and the laws in general.

In sum, the discursive practices of my informants reflected many themes that exist in the state preschool political discourse and which were used to describe their experiences of belonging and non-belonging in relation to preschool and Swedish society as a whole. The child as a societal concern, the child as developing, and the child as competent or incompetent were some of the depictions of children found in the data. The parents also referred in their writing to the importance of the child's wellbeing and of the obligation to report on children's maltreatment. They wrote about how preschool practices encouraged the child's learning through discovering the world outside the home and family and the importance of surrounding the child with trustworthy adults and creating equality between adults and children. There was also the theme of children's participation and the right to live a life in which the child was shown respect. The theme of integration, and the efforts made to integrate, was also found in the data, as well as the theme of *us* and *them*. New arrival parents seemed to be aware of the state preschool political discourse's strong emphasis on *us*, Swedes, and *them*, new arrival immigrants.

Chapter 7: New Arrival Immigrant Children as a Concern for Preschool

In chapters five and six, I have shown how new arrival parents perceived Swedish preschool in relation to themselves, their children and their families. In this chapter, I investigate how the state preschool political discourse has perceived immigrant families, parents and children over the last fifty years. To do so, I study reports of government commissions, bills, a pedagogical program and a curriculum with revisions dating from the early 1970s until 2020. It is important to point out that these texts addressed the issue of immigration in general, and referred to immigrant children and parents and not to new arrivals. However, in this study, the focus is on new arrivals, whom I consider to be part of the general category of *immigrants*. I have also included the new curriculum from 2018 and a government commission report from 2020, since they have been part of the discursive and social practice that I have taken part in, as a researcher, through my interpretations of the informants' writings.

I have focused on the sections of the texts where "immigrant" was included as a subtopic. In texts without such subtopics, I searched for the term "immigrant" or similar, since the terms in use changed over the fifty-year period. Moreover, I focused on how immigrant children, immigrant parents and preschool practitioners were presented and positioned in relation to preschool, i.e. I analyzed how these actors were given agency (or not) within the discourse. In addition, and when applicable, I analyzed how immigration as a phenomenon was presented in the texts. In short, I present how immigration was constructed in relation to preschool and preschool's mission in the texts, which I regard as the discursive and social event of which the newly arrived informants' writings were part.

In this chapter, I present my analysis of how immigration was constructed chronologically, starting in the 1970s and ending with the most recent government commission's report, from 2020, which is included in the concluding discussion. The subtopics present the kind of text analyzed and I start each subtopic entry with a brief description of how the texts were organized. After the chronologically organized investigation, I perform a language-oriented

analysis of how immigrant children and parents were constructed in the different texts over the fifty-year period, in the different examples that were selected for this chapter.⁷⁷

Throughout the chapter, I argue that there was a dual discourse about how preschool perceived immigrants. Firstly, the discourse presented immigrants as contributing to Swedish preschool and society. Secondly, it presented immigrants as having special needs. These themes ran parallel throughout the whole period and produced a complex, and sometimes contradictory, discourse. In the final discussion, I consider how preschool has handled the theme of “special needs” in general, i.e. in a broader context than immigration, as well as in relation to immigrants and my findings as presented in the chapter. I now start with the 1972 government commission’s report.

The 1972 Government Commission’s Report *Preschool 1 and 2*⁷⁸

In the 1970s, as shown in previous research, there was a political mobilization aiming to create an immigration policy. Preschool was included in this policy as a means of reaching immigrant parents and children for the purpose of integration (see also Gruber & Puskás, 2013). This could explain why the 1972 report by the government commission of inquiry into preschool dealt so thoroughly with the issue of immigration. In the report, immigrant children were presented in two sections; firstly, in a two-page text about child-to-child relationships and, secondly, in chapter 17 about immigrant children in preschool. Immigrant children were also included in a chapter about children with special needs, and occasionally in different sections of the text, particularly when different perspectives on language were put forward. I focus mainly on the topics about child-to-child relationships and immigrant children in preschool and show how immigrant children, immigrant parents and practitioners were presented.

Defining the Problem of Immigration

The chapter about immigrant children in preschool began with a background. It described the problems related to the rise of immigration in Swedish society:

Example 1.

The increase in immigration during the late 1960s and early 1970s has meant that a large number of municipalities have been confronted with the special problems that an inflow of many people from a different cultural and linguistic

⁷⁷ All examples presented in this chapter are my translation of the Swedish text.

⁷⁸ Sw. “Förskolan 1” SOU 1972:26 and “Förskolan 2” SOU 1972:27.

background entails. The difficulties can be briefly described in terms of language, contact and information problems. (SOU 1972:27, p. 307)⁷⁹

The commissioners stated that the information issue was twofold; by this, they meant that immigrants should be informed about their rights and obligations and Swedes should be informed about the immigrants' backgrounds and living conditions. The commissioners provided a historical background of immigration to Sweden. There had been immigrant workers coming to the country since at least the 1940s, and the number had increased dramatically during the 1960s and early 1970s. This increase was due to a need in Sweden caused by labor shortages. Also, refugees had arrived. Swedish society took more responsibility for the refugees than for people coming to work. The municipalities could not meet the problems caused by the increase in immigration:

Example 2.

With the increase in immigration, the number of people who were completely dependent on the municipality's opportunities to support them for the first time also increased. The municipalities had and have great difficulties in meeting the immigrants' need for service and help, not least due to a lack of knowledgeable staff and financial resources. (SOU 1972:27, p. 307)⁸⁰

With this more detailed background, the commissioners provided an explanation for why several municipalities were having to deal with problems related to difficulties concerning language, contact and information between immigrants and Swedes, as shown in Example 2. Later in the chapter, the situation for one of the municipalities, which had the highest number of immigrants, was presented: "In the autumn of 1970, the municipality had 558 immigrant children aged 4–6 years, divided into the following nationalities: Finns 351, Yugoslavs 39, Greeks 36, other 132 (18 nationalities) (SOU 1972:27, p. 12).⁸¹ The commissioners went on to describe the different measures taken by the state to meet and solve the problems, for example, by setting up a government commission of inquiry in the late 1960s with seven experts on immigration, and establishing a government agency for immigration in 1969 (SOU 1972:72, pp. 307–308).

⁷⁹ Sw. "Den ökade invandringen under slutet av 1960-talet och i början av 1970-talet har medfört, att ett stort antal kommuner konfronterats med den speciella problematik som en inflyttning av många människor från en annan kulturell och språklig bakgrund innebär. Svårigheterna kan kortfattat beskrivas i termer av språk-, kontakt- och informationsproblem."

⁸⁰ Sw. "I och med den ökade invandringen ökade också antalet personer som var helt beroende av kommunens möjligheter att stödja dem den första tiden. Kommunerna hade och har stora svårigheter att tillgodose invandrarnas behov av service och hjälp, inte minst på grund av brist på kunnig personal och ekonomiska resurser."

⁸¹ Sw. "Hösten 1970 hade kommunen 558 invandrabarn i åldern 4–6 år, fördelade på följande nationaliteter: finländare 351, jugoslaver 39, greker 36, övriga 132 (18 nationaliteter)."

The chapter stated that “Swedish immigration policy” strove to keep immigrant families together, which had led to an increase in the number of such families with children:

Example 3.

Swedish immigration policy, unlike that of some other countries, has focused on helping immigrants keep their families together. This and the age distribution among immigrants—the majority are aged 20–40—has led to an increase in the number of immigrant families with children. (SOU 1972:27, p. 308)⁸²

As this quotation shows, the commissioners strove to communicate an image of Swedish family policy as special in relation to other countries, and also as beneficial to immigrants, since it provided opportunities for such families to have children. Immigrants were also described as dependent on Swedish society to be able to function on the same terms as Swedes. Therefore, preschool could make a difference:

Example 4.

Most of these children and their parents need special help and support from Swedish society in order to function on the same terms as Swedes. *Great demands are placed on preschool and school when it comes to utilizing the positive experiences that the immigrant children provide at the same time as the immigrant children's special needs are met.* (SOU 1972:27, p. 308, my italics)⁸³

As shown in this example, the commissioners presented a dual image of immigrant children in relation to preschool—as a strength, because they brought positive experiences to preschool, and as in need of special support. The responsibility for managing both of these aspects related to immigrant children was placed on the preschool, i.e. the service institution for all families and children in Sweden, as described in the introduction to this thesis.

The Immigrant Child and Swedish Children

It had already been outlined in the first part of the commission's report that immigrant children could contribute to preschool when attending it. The two-page section about immigrant children started with a statement that it was positive that more and more immigrant children were going to preschool. The

⁸² Sw. “Den svenska invandringpolitiken har, till skillnad från en del andra länders, inriktat sig på att hjälpa invandrarna att hålla samman familjen. Detta och åldersfördelningen bland invandrarna - flertalet är i åldern 20-40 år - har medfört att antalet invandrarfamiljer med barn ökat.”

⁸³ Sw. “Flertalet av dessa barn och deras föräldrar behöver särskild hjälp och stöd från det svenska samhället för att kunna fungera på samma villkor som svenskarna. Det ställs stora krav på förskolan och skolan då det gäller att utnyttja de positiva erfarenheter som invandrabarnen ger samtidigt som invandrabarnens speciella behov tillgodoses.”

commissioners described the positive outcomes of this for the immigrant children themselves, and also for Swedish children and society at large. They wrote:

Example 5.

To an increasing extent, immigrant children are included in preschool children's groups. This is a positive phenomenon from many points of view. *For the immigrant child*, preschool can mean a first introduction to Swedish society, where they can be gently channeled into the new country's cultural conditions. In playing together with Swedish children, the immigrant child receives help to acquire the Swedish language and is trained to communicate with others. *For the Swedish children*, it is of great importance that they meet children and adults from other countries at an early stage and thus concretely experience different perceptions, expressions, etc., than the usual ones. You can consolidate class boundaries if you do not integrate immigrant children at an early age. We must arrive at a more generous society. A global view of the human being and their living conditions and, above all, the right to a dignified existence can be established early on, *if the child has concrete experiences of people from other countries and thus encounters adults' positive attitudes and willingness to work for internationalism.* (SOU 1972:26, p. 125; my italics)⁸⁴

Hence, according to the commissioners, it was a positive development that there were increased numbers of immigrant children in preschool groups of children. The immigrant child was presented in the singular and Swedish children in the plural. The immigrant child was on his/her own in a group of children who already knew each other. My interpretation is that the reference to "preschool children's groups" in Example 5 meant groups of Swedish children. The implication was that preschool was Swedish, filled with Swedish children, into which the immigrant child needed to be included. This interpretation is different from how Björk-Willén, Gruber and Puskás (2013) describe the relationship between singularity and plurality. According to them, even though there might be several minorities in the preschool policy, the majority was presented in the singular and seldom defined. My example shows that, in the early 1970s, immigrant children could be singular and children defined as

⁸⁴ Sw. "I allt större omfattning ingår invandrarbarn i förskolans barngrupper. Detta är från många synpunkter en positiv företeelse. För invandrarbarnet kan förskolan betyda en första introduktion till det svenska samhället, där det varsamt kan slussas in i det nya landets kulturella förhållanden. I leksamvaro med svenska barn får invandrarbarnet hjälp att tillägna sig svenska språket och får träna sig i att kommunicera med andra. För de svenska barnen är det av stor betydelse att de tidigt möter barn och vuxna från andra länder och därmed konkret får uppleva andra uppfattningar uttryckt m m, än de gängse. Man kan befästa klassgränser om man inte tidigt integrerar invandrarbarn. Man måste komma fram till ett generösare samhälle. En global syn på människan och hennes livsbetingelser och framför allt rätt till en värdig tillvaro kan grundläggas tidigt, om barnet får konkreta upplevelser av människor från andra länder och därvid möter de vuxnas positiva inställning och vilja att verka för en internationalism."

Swedish could be presented in the plural, as well as in the sentence “groups of children.”

As Example 5 shows, the situation was presented as though, when an immigrant child joined a group of Swedish children, that child experienced natural contact with Swedish children. When included in the group of Swedish children, the positive outcomes for the immigrant child multiplied; the child could gain a smooth introduction to Swedish society with its cultural traditions, acquire the Swedish language and communicate with others. All these positive outcomes were achieved via play. This was repeated in the specific chapter about immigrant children, with the addition that Swedish children were described as “the children of the new country”: “In play together with the children of the new country, the immigrant child is helped to acquire the Swedish language and is trained to communicate with others” (SOU 1972:27, p. 309).⁸⁵ Hence, the commissioners created an image of immigrant children getting help from Swedish children, i.e. a notion of children helping each other was produced. Having Swedish playmates was again highlighted as important:

Example 6.

The immigrant children learn relatively quickly to understand and speak Swedish, if they have Swedish playmates. With the spontaneous learning of the language that takes place during play with Swedish-speaking peers, the immigrant child is also trained to express his/her feelings, such as anger, sadness, joy, etc. In the interaction with his Swedish-speaking peers, the child also experiences that he himself in turn becomes the subject of such feelings and emotional expressions. [...] The interpretation and expression of the experiences in play activities and other daily activities should be the starting point for teaching the Swedish language. [...] Preschool can make a great contribution to the child by gently helping the child in the form of play and stimulating them to learn Swedish. This help should be provided as early as possible, preferably as early as four years of age. (SOU 1972:27, p. 309)⁸⁶

Play was described as a natural activity for all children in other sections of the commission’s report (see Lindgren, 2006 for an in-depth discussion of play in the reports of government commissions of inquiry). Hence, the commissioners produced an image of Swedish preschool as a place of positive and effortless

⁸⁵ Sw. “I lekamarvar med det nya landets barn får invandrarbarnet hjälp att tillägna sig svenska språket och får träna sig att kommunicera med andra.”

⁸⁶ Sw. “Invandrarbarnen lär sig relativt fort att förstå och tala svenska, om de har svenska lekamarater. I och med den spontana inläring av språket som sker vid lek med svensktalande kamrater övas också invandrarbarnet i att uttrycka sina känslor som vrede, sorg, glädje osv. Barnet upplever också i samspelet med sina svensktalande kamrater att det självt i sin tur blir föremål för sådana känslor och känslouttryck. [...] Tolkning av och uttryck för upplevelserna i lekaktiviteter och andra dagliga aktiviteter bör just vara utgångspunkten för undervisning i svenska språket. [...] Förskolan kan göra en stor insats för barnet genom att barnet i lekens form försiktigt hjälps och stimuleras till att lära svenska. Denna hjälp bör sättas in så tidigt som möjligt, helst redan i 4-årsåldern.”

socialization for the immigrant child. According to the commissioners, via play, he/she could acquire the desirable competences to learn about Swedish culture, language and communication. Included in that process was learning to express feelings and emotions in a “gentle” way. Age was considered important in this context, and four years old was described as the earliest possible, and preferable, age to give immigrant children such “help.”

There was also something to be gained for the Swedish children when socializing with an immigrant child, as described in Example 5. Interactions with other children and adults that exposed children to something “different” from “the usual” was rewarding. Children who experienced this would be more prepared to live in the increasingly globalized world, according to the commissioners. In the chapter about immigrant children, the aspect that immigrants brought something valuable to Sweden was again emphasized: “It must be judged as extremely valuable for Swedish society to have access to people who are bilingual and have in-depth knowledge of other countries” (SOU 1972:27, p. 319).⁸⁷ I interpret this as an example of the commissioners’ way of presenting an image of how Swedish children could also gain language skills and cultural competence from the immigrant child if they interacted in preschool.

Moreover, I want to point out that the commissioners produced an image of children supporting each other as a resource in Example 5. In the child-to-child relationships, children could gain from each other’s competencies and resources. Immigrant children could learn about Sweden and Swedish children could learn about the world outside of Sweden and become prepared to develop a “global view,” from which they would benefit. The idea that internationalism was a positive aim, and that preschool should support such an idea, was also part of how the ideas from the commission’s report were broadcast in educational television programs about preschool at this time (see Lindgren, 2003a). I show here how this was also made relevant in relation to immigrants. The image produced was that, when different children were in dialectical relationship, they could mutually benefit from each other’s experiences and competences. Preschool was framed as the place where such productive meetings could occur and they were shown as imperative for creating positive changes and developments for the entire society.

Immigrant Children, Special Needs and Language Preschools

Another theme that ran in parallel in the discourse was the figure of immigrant children as a group with special needs, like other children who were in need of special language education and support (see also Gruber & Puskás, 2013). The commission explained in its report that “immigrant children often have

⁸⁷ Sw. “Det måste bedömas som ytterst värdefullt för det svenska samhället att ha tillgång till personer som är tvåspråkiga och har ingående kunskaper om andra länder.”

big difficulties in understanding and speaking Swedish, they can be considered to belong to that group who are in need of special help and support from society” (SOU 1972:27, p. 319).⁸⁸ The reference to “that group,” in the context of the commission’s report, meant disabled children and children in sparsely populated areas. The special needs of such children were also presented in specific chapters (disabled children in chapter 16 and children in sparsely populated areas in chapter 18). Chapter 17, about immigrant children in preschool, mainly concerned language preschools.

In addition to learning Swedish via play, as mentioned above, the commissioners pointed out that immigrant children needed more support to learn the language. When arguing for this, they said that learning the language via playing with Swedish-speaking children was not enough, and more was needed for them to master Swedish. Words and terms from different areas should be included in the language learning and this was also important to enable the immigrant child to talk about home in preschool, and vice versa:

Example 7.

However, the language that immigrant children learn from their Swedish-speaking peers usually only covers a small portion of the concepts and words that the child needs in order to master Swedish. Language learning therefore needs to be supplemented and built up with more systematic teaching. In this teaching, the focus should be on introducing words and concepts from different areas of activity so that the immigrant child does not get a relatively good vocabulary in one sector but is completely without one in another. For example, the child may not be able to describe activities that have taken place at home in Swedish for the preschool staff. The child may also not be able to describe the preschool activities at home for the parents. (SOU 1972:27, p. 309)⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Sw. “På grund av att invandrabarnen ofta har stora svårigheter att förstå och tala svenska kan de anses tillhöra den grupp som är i behov av särskild hjälp och stöd från samhällets sida.” More examples: “children with special needs for language stimulation, such as immigrant children” (“barn med särskilda behov av språklig stimulans, t ex invandrabarn”) (SOU 1972:26, p. 187); “in language training, especially for immigrant children and children who need special developmental assistance” (“i språklig träning, i synnerhet för invandrabarn och barn som behöver särskild utvecklingshjälp”) (SOU 1972:26, p. 189); “children with special needs such as language materials for immigrant children” (“barn med särskilda behov såsom språkmaterial för invandrabarn”) (SOU 1972:26, p. 296); “at the same time as the special needs of immigrant children are met” (“samtidigt som invandrabarnens speciella behov tillgodoses”) (SOU 1972:27, p. 319).

⁸⁹ Sw. “Det språk som invandrabarnen lär sig av sina svensktalande kamrater täcker dock i regel endast en liten del av de begrepp och ord som barnet behöver för att behärska svenskan. Språkinläring behöver därför kompletteras och byggas på med en mer systematisk undervisning. Man bör vid denna undervisning inrikta sig på att föra in ord och begrepp från olika verksamhetsområden så att inte invandrabarnet får ett relativt gott ordförråd inom en sektor men är helt utan ett sådant i en annan. Det kan exempelvis vara så att barnet ej kan beskriva aktiviteter som förekommit i hemmet på svenska för personalen i förskolan. Barnet kan kanske ej heller beskriva förskolaktiviteterna hemma för föräldrarna.”

Hence, it was not enough for the immigrant child to learn Swedish via play. That could lead to a lack of knowledge when talking about areas outside the preschool and play activities; therefore, more resources were needed to help the immigrant child. If the child did not learn enough Swedish, communication between preschool and the home may be jeopardized. The commissioners continued their argument by saying that “some” immigrant children could be in need of education “both in their own mother tongue and in the Swedish language”:

Example 8.

In some cases, immigrant children may need education both in their own mother tongue and in the Swedish language. This is especially true in cases where the home environment may be linguistically poor and where the parents cannot be influenced to stimulate the child's linguistic ability to express himself or herself in the mother tongue. If this is not noticed in preschool, the result can be linguistically such for the child that it has two half languages neither of which is sufficient for the child to be able to communicate other than in superficial and meager forms of expression. (SOU 1972:27, p. 309, my italics)⁹⁰

Thus, according to the commissioners, some but not all immigrant children should have the opportunity to learn their mother tongue at preschool, in addition to Swedish. They assumed that some immigrant parents provided “linguistically poor” home environments and were unable to stimulate their children’s learning of the mother tongue. In such cases, the child ran the risk of not developing either language properly to be able communicate with others. The image of a child with “two half languages” was created as something to be avoided. It was of uttermost importance that the training in Swedish did not suppress the mother tongue or lead to the child experiencing the mother tongue as less valuable (than Swedish). Therefore, the report explained that when immigrant children were integrated into the regular preschool, a person with mastery of the child’s mother tongue, i.e. who could “speak and read with the children in their own mother tongue,” should come to the preschool once a week.

The preferred practice was to integrate immigrant children into regular preschool, i.e. from the age of six.⁹¹ The second best was to prepare immigrant children in specific immigrant preschools and then subsequently introduce them to a regular establishment (SOU 1972:26, pp. 92, 127). For such reasons,

⁹⁰ Sw. “I vissa fall torde invandrarbarnen behöva undervisning både i sitt eget modersmål och i det svenska språket. Det gäller i all synnerhet i de fall där hemmiljön kan tänkas vara språkligt torftig och där föräldrarna inte kan påverkas till att stimulera barnets språkliga uttrycksförmåga på modersmålet. Uppmärksammas inte detta i förskolan kan resultatet språkmässigt bli så för barnet, att det förfogar över två halva språk som ingetdera är tillräckligt för att barnet skall kunna kommunicera annat än med ytliga och torftiga uttryckssätt.”

⁹¹ As with disabled children and children living in sparsely populated areas. The regular (Sw. reguljära) preschool (Sw. lekskola/playschool) was for six-year-old children, and was half day.

i.e. to become bilingual, and to be able to integrate into school with “more equal opportunities,” immigrant children might sometimes need to attend language preschool (SOU 1972:27, p. 310).⁹²

The commissioners described different pilot schemes implemented by municipalities with “many” immigrant children. The presentation was organized in accordance with the language mix in the immigrant children’s groups, and according to how the language training was organized. The different projects were: i) Projects where immigrant children were integrated with Swedish children in regular preschool (30 children aged five to six, from Finland and Turkey); ii) Projects with solely immigrant children who shared the same language or in mixed language groups; iii) language preschools to train the immigrant children in their own mother tongue. In one model, the immigrant children were organized into what was described as a separate language preschool with Swedish as the language of communication. The target group for these preschools was immigrant children aged four to five and the practitioners spoke Swedish. In a second model, the language preschool used the children’s own mother tongue as the language of communication. These schools targeted immigrant children aged four to five, and the practitioners were fluent in both the children’s mother tongue and Swedish (SOU 1972:27, pp. 311–312).

In the first two models, the language preschool was organized within a section of a preschool. Teachers and parents judged when a child was mature enough to be transferred to the regular preschool. Immigrant children in regular preschool could be transferred to a language preschool “if problems occurred in their contact with the Swedish group” (SOU 1972:27, p. 313).⁹³

In the third model, immigrant children were integrated into a regular preschool (immigrant children and Swedish children aged six). The immigrant children were given special training in the Swedish language by a primary school teacher. A teacher fluent in the immigrant children’s mother tongue, bilingual and preferably with some pedagogical training, should be available in the preschool to “stimulate the immigrant children’s development in their own mother tongue and their emotional development” (SOU 1972:27, p. 313).⁹⁴ When these children turned seven, they continued on to primary school with continuing special training in Swedish.

Lessons learned from the experimental activities included that six-year-old immigrant children should *not be* in special language preschools since they needed to be in contact with their future classmates. One or two years in a special language preschool before starting regular preschool was, however, regarded as advantageous for immigrant children younger than six. It was also

⁹² Sw. “språkförskolor,” “språklekskolor.”

⁹³ Sw. “om problem uppstår i kontakten med den svenska gruppen.”

⁹⁴ Sw. “för att stimulera invandrarbarnens utveckling i det egna modersmålet och deras känslomässiga utveckling.”

important to always include Swedish children in the group in order to facilitate spontaneous language learning, except where the purpose was solely learning the mother tongue. More practitioners were needed to support and train the immigrant child in developing Swedish language skills.

Active Practitioners with Respect for Immigrant Parents

The two-page section about immigrant children in the government commission, mentioned above, continued with a description of the new demands that were placed on preschool practitioners in order to integrate an immigrant child. As shown in Example 9, the most important aspect was the ability to empathize with the immigrants' situation. When the commissioners presented this view, they did not refer to immigrants, but instead to families in general, and what a change in one's living environment would entail. The commissioners spoke from the perspective of a person, any person, coming into a new environment and experiencing it as different and deviating from the "home country." They then shifted perspective and spoke from the position of the host society. According to the commissioners, immigrant parents' values could be very different from Swedish values. Most important for the practitioners in preschool who were Swedes was to be patient, and to strive for contact and a mutual understanding of the differences:

Example 9.

The integration of immigrant children into preschool places special and often completely *new demands on the staff in the preschool*. Above all, empathy is required about what it can mean for a family to break away from an established environment and meet *life patterns that are sometimes markedly different* from those that are common in the *home country*. *The immigrant parents' views on upbringing, religious affiliation, relationships between men and women, etc. can differ significantly from Swedish values*. Therefore, larger or smaller *conflicts can easily arise*, which are *inevitable in the confrontation between different cultures*. It is important that *the staff have the insight* that differences in values and norms cannot always be completely smoothed out or denied. At the same time, it is important to realize *that understanding and tolerance can often be reached*, but sometimes only after getting to know each other a little better. *Preconceived notions or conclusions too quickly drawn*, where one does not position a certain behavior or value in a larger context, prevent such contact. (SOU 1972:26, pp. 125–126, my italics)⁹⁵

⁹⁵ Sw. "En integration av invandrabarn i förskolan ställer speciella och ofta helt nya krav på personalen i förskolan. Främst krävs en inlevelseförmåga i vad det kan innebära för en familj att bryta upp från en invand miljö och möta livsmönster som ibland är markant avvikande från dem som är vanliga i hemlandet. Invandrarföräldrarnas syn på uppföstran, religionstillhörighet, relation mellan man och kvinna m m [sic] kan väsentligen skilja sig från svenska värderingar. Det kan därför lätt uppstå mer eller mindre konflikter, vilka är ofrånkomliga i konfrontationen mellan skilda kulturer. Den insikten att skillnader i värderingar och normer inte alltid

As shown in Example 9, the commissioners described differences in values as something natural and to be expected. It was important that the practitioners realized this as a fact, even though they could be caught in situations where a “confrontation between different cultures occurred.” The goal should not be to create a conflict-free preschool environment, but rather to encounter others with patience and tolerance and for Swedish practitioners to be willing to learn more in order to achieve this goal.

Such a view on conflicts, that they are part of how a society functions and that one needs to find strategies to deal with them, rather than suppressing and ignoring them, was also part of the preschool discourse disseminated via educational television about preschool, in which the issue of immigrants was not addressed (Lindgren, 2003a). These television programs were supposed to teach such norms to the general public, practitioners and parents. The programs were broadcast on public television and distributed via tapes to preschool practitioners to be used in their further training. The producers of the programs held meetings with the government commissioners. Hence, the ambition to develop strategies for how to handle conflicts was communicated via both public television and the commissioners’ report (Lindgren, 2003a). I show how such a general aim was also applied to instruct practitioners in how they should meet immigrant children and parents in preschool.

Moreover, as seen in Example 9, the commissioners gave a specific presentation on how to achieve the aim of approaching values and norms that differ from Swedish ones. To be able to succeed in their approach, practitioners had to bear in mind the “larger context.” In my interpretation, this reference to a larger context connected to the idea expressed at the beginning of the same example, i.e. that being in a family who had to move away from the known was something that could happen to anyone, including a Swede. This is another example of how the commissioners strove to create a balance in the view they presented, taking in the positions of both Swedes and immigrants. In terms of agency, however, a difference was made clear in the discourse. It was the practitioners who were expected to develop an understanding of the larger context. It was the practitioners who were expected to act and react with tolerance when they came into contact with the unknown. No such expectations, or “demands,” were put on the immigrants. Hence, this gave the practitioners an active role and agency as well as a responsibility to act and evaluate, and left the immigrants with little ability to act or contribute to the situation.

In parallel with these notions of the immigrant parent as unable to actively contribute to preschool, the commissioners recognized that immigrant parents

kan helt slätas ut eller förnekas är det viktigt att personalen har. Samtidigt är det viktigt att inse att förståelse och tolerans ofta kan nås, men ibland först sedan man lärt känna varandra något närmare. Förutfattade meningar eller alltför snabba slutsatser, där man inte sätter in ett visst beteende eller värdering i ett större sammanhang, förhindrar en sådan kontakt.”

had different norms and values than Swedish ones (see Example 10). As in the example above, the text gave a description of children and parents in general. It was essential for practitioners to understand that children felt “trust in the parents” and that this was important for a child’s development. If a child “at an early age develops a critical attitude to what the parents represent,” then his/her development was at risk. This image of the role of parents in children’s lives was applicable to all parents and children, regardless of whether they were Swedes or immigrants. In the next sentence, however, the commissioners made it clear that the issue concerned immigrants by making a direct reference to the immigrant child and describing why and how collaboration between preschool and immigrant parents was important:

Example 10.

Preschool staff should realize that a child’s trust in the parents and their norms/values is primary for the child’s development and that it is risky if the child at an early age develops a critical attitude to what the parents represent. Good supervision of an *immigrant child* therefore requires that a collaboration can be gradually developed between parents and staff. *Collaboration between the preschool and immigrant parents* should be based on comprehensive information for parents about the preschool’s goals and ways of working, as well as *how it may affect the immigrant child and his/her situation in a positive direction*. Based on such information, the preschool staff should seek, through conversations with the parents, to get an idea of how they perceive the preschool’s program in relation to themselves, and whether they defend themselves against special elements in terms of the preschool’s education or content. This is especially important because both parents and staff must appreciate *the immigrant child’s special risk situation, that in preschool he/she may try to adapt to the values and patterns that apply there, and to the parents’ values in the home situation*. Such a *dual adaptation affects the socialization process*, especially if many of the values the child encounters *and tries to adapt to are contradictory*. *The preschool staff must take the greatest responsibility here by letting the child experience respect for what the parents represent*. (SOU 1972:26, p. 126, my italics)⁹⁶

⁹⁶ Sw. “Förskolans personal bör inse att barnets tillit till föräldrarna och deras normer/värderingar är primära för barnets utveckling och att det är riskabelt om barnet i tidig ålder får en kritisk inställning till det som föräldrarna representerar. En god handledning av ett invandrarbarn kräver därför att ett samarbete successivt kan utvecklas mellan föräldrar och personal. Samverkan mellan förskola och invandrarföräldrar bör utgå ifrån en omfattande information till föräldrarna om förskolans mål, sätt att arbeta liksom hur den kan tänkas påverka invandrarbarnet och dess situation i positiv riktning. Utifrån en dylik information bör förskolans personal genom samtal med föräldrarna söka få en bild av hur de uppfattar förskolans program i förhållande till och om de värjer sig för speciella inslag i fråga om förskolans fostran och innehåll. Detta är särskilt viktigt därför att både föräldrar och personal måste inse invandrarbarnets speciella risksituation, att det i förskolan kanske försöker anpassa sig till de värderingar och mönster som gäller där, men till föräldrarnas värderingar i hemsituationen. En sådan dubbel anpassning påverkar socialiseringsprocessen, i all synnerhet om många av de värderingar barnet möter och försöker anpassa sig till är motstridiga. Förskolans personal måste här ta det största ansvaret genom att låta barnet uppleva respekt för vad föräldrarna representerar.” In

This example could be interpreted as meaning that the commissioners acknowledged that immigrant parents were different from Swedes and that they were entitled to continue being different. Immigrant parents did not necessarily need to belong to the host society, they could belong to something else, which is in line with a liberal and permissive view of *the other* as worthy of respect. The final sentence certainly encourages such an interpretation, especially because it did not make reference to immigrants. Again, it was as though the commissioners could have been talking about any children and parents.

Situating the example in its societal context can be helpful here. At that time, the idea that preschool should become compulsory was being proposed in the public debate in Sweden and the suggestion was met with critique, as I explained in the introductory chapter. In line with this, the example could be interpreted as being a way for the commissioners to say that preschool was a voluntary offering and that it respected parents' points of view, including in a context where the subjects were immigrant parents. Thus, I suggest that, if interpreted as a positive view giving immigrants an opportunity to belong to something more and not only to the host society, it was because preschool was primarily framed as voluntary. Presenting preschool as voluntary dominated the discourse.

Another interpretation could be that what was actually produced in this example was notions of immigrant parents as the other and as a problem. In spite of the importance given to respecting immigrant parents, they were also the reason why their children were at risk, in a "special risk situation." When immigrant children tried to adapt to the "contradictory" values of preschool and their parents' values at home, this caused a potentially problematic socialization process, according to the commissioners. It was preschool that helped to direct "the immigrant child and his/her situation in a positive direction" and therefore immigrant parents must collaborate with preschool. It was preschool and its practitioners that formulated the goals and information given to parents, it was the practitioners who invited conversation and who had "the greatest responsibility" to ensure that immigrant children respected their parents. The image of immigrant parents was primarily as people being steered by preschool, and not as being able to steer preschool.

addition it was the responsibility of the preschool to make contact with the immigrant children's parents as well as informing the parents about the preschool (SOU 1972:27, p. 320).

The 1973 Bill about the *Expansion of Preschool*⁹⁷

The 1973 government bill followed up on the 1972 report by the government commissions of inquiry and proposed a package of reforms to improve the quality, access and role of preschool in society. These reforms included the first preschool law in Sweden. This law gave all six-year-old children the right to be in preschool for three hours per day. This was to be voluntary and free of charge. The reform package also included the provision that preschool should have a pedagogical program based on scientific theories about children's development. The municipalities must take an active role in implementing preschool for all; they must provide more places and work actively to inform parents about preschool.

The bill included a special section where the government commission's findings were recapped, as a way to present the arguments supporting the reform. This was presented as eight topics, sometimes with subtopics. In the first topic, an introduction, the commission, according to the bill, had suggested that, in many ways, the preschool age determined the future development of the child and that was why society needed to pay more attention than before to children's living conditions while they were growing up. Therefore, measures should be taken to support parents' ability to function well in their parental roles and to support their children's general and individual needs. The bill concurred with the commission's conclusion that such measures taken by society to support children's development were important. The pedagogical program should be understood as a part of social policy's provision for children's upbringing and their interaction with parents and the wider society (Prop. 1973:136, pp. 12, 22). The pedagogical program and the general goals for preschool should express this "ideological background" (Prop. 1973:136, p. 12)⁹⁸. The focus of the bill was to increase preschool's role across the whole of society, for all children. Immigrants were rarely mentioned, and when they were, it was in relation to their special needs.

Groups with Special Difficulties

With reference to the commission's report, the bill explained that the role of preschool was to reduce differences in children's living conditions later in life. The differences in choice of education were still related to differences in the home environment and the differences between boys and girls were large. Supporting children through preschool was seen as a way to develop their own inner abilities instead of being affected by traditions and attitudes based on factors such as gender or social group (Prop. 1973:136, pp. 12–13). It was of paramount importance that preschool "must reach children at an early age,"

⁹⁷ Sw. "Förskolans utbyggnad och organisation."

⁹⁸ Sw. "ideologisk bakgrund."

the bill stated with reference to the commission, and here it mentioned immigrant families for the first time:

Example 11.

The inquiry [the report by government commissions SOU 1972:26 & 27, my comment] emphasizes that preschool must reach children at an early age in order to be able to reduce the differences in starting position between different groups. This equality requirement is particularly noticeable *for children who have a worse starting position and therefore need extra support to ensure their rights*. This applies to the integration of disabled children in society, whether it is a matter of physical, mental, social or linguistic disabilities. *This includes, for example, the special difficulties of many immigrant families*. This may also apply to children *from isolated, sparsely populated areas* with too few opportunities for contacts outside the family. (Prop. 1973:136, p. 13, my italics).⁹⁹

The strong emphasis on preschool as a representative of society and society's increased role in bringing up all children—an argument that was supported with reference to scientific research, and articulated equality as an overall goal—has been described in research as part of the then ongoing process of societalization and scientificization of childhood in Sweden, and which increased via preschool policymaking during the 1970s (Lindgren, 2003a; 2003b; 2006). Preschool's role in societal change was emphasized, particularly as a way to give children an opportunity for change via access to different traditions, norms and values than the ones they experienced in their families and at home. It was a discourse in which all children and parents were presented as in need of support from preschool. Both children and parents should be educated by the preschool (Lindgren, 2003a; 2006).

In addition, I have already briefly described how this was formulated in the government bill with reference to the commission's report and with a focus on immigrants. I have also shown how the government commission's writings about immigrant children depict them primarily as an asset to preschool. However, when they were introduced in the bill, this had been translated into an image of the immigrant family as having "special difficulties" closely related to different forms of disability. Hence, it was not solely the immigrant children who had special needs; the parents were also included in this categorization since it concerned the whole family. However, according to Example 11, children from "isolated, sparsely populated areas" were also included in the cate-

⁹⁹ Sw. "Utredningen understryker att förskolan måste nå barnen i tidig ålder för att kunna minska skillnaderna i utgångsläge mellan olika grupper. Detta jämlikhetskrav är särskilt påtagligt för barn som har ett sämre utgångsläge och därför behöver extra stöd för att komma till sin rätt. Det gäller integrationen av handikappade barn i samhället, antingen det är fråga om fysiska, psykiska, sociala eller språkliga handikapp. Det gäller bl.a. många invandrarfamiljers speciella svårigheter. Det kan också gälla barn från isolerade glesbygder med alltför begränsade möjligheter till kontakter utanför familjen."

gory of families in special need of support from society. Hence, disabled children and children living in sparsely populated areas were singled out as specific groups in need of preschool—in addition to immigrant children. These three groups of children should be integrated into society via preschool. They should have access to regular preschool from the age of four.¹⁰⁰ I want to point out both that immigrant families were singled out, and the way in which they were singled out in relation to special needs and disabilities.

In its continued recap of the commission's report, the bill inserted a topic about children "in need of special support and stimulation." A subtopic about immigrant children reinforced the notion that immigrant families were in need of "special support" and that immigrant children were in need of two kinds of language training:

Example 12.

The inquiry [the report by the government commission SOU 1972:26 & 27, my comment] highlights *the need for special support from society so that immigrant families and their children can function on the same terms as other families with children in this country*. It is important that immigrant children can learn Swedish during the preschool period. The inquiry emphasizes the importance of language in social and emotional terms. However, language teaching for immigrant children should not only be a matter of teaching Swedish, but also of training the child *in his/her own mother tongue*. The inquiry emphasizes that mother tongue training is important when learning a new language. *There is a risk that immigrant children will not learn to completely master either their mother tongue or the Swedish language*. Immigrant children should primarily be placed in *regular preschools*, but sometimes other forms may be more appropriate. (Prop. 1973:136, p. 16, my italics)¹⁰¹

Hence, the bill rearticulated the commission's argument about the need to integrate immigrants into Swedish society via preschool, and the special needs that immigrants were presumed to have. What was not recapped or rearticu-

¹⁰⁰ Outreach (Sw. uppsökande verksamhet) was needed to target all children's parents, and especially parents of children in special need of support and stimulation, and immigrant children's parents (Prop. 1973:136, pp. 16–19, 25). Immigrant children might need to be prioritized for a place in preschool and the outreach was suggested to take place in three ways (letter, direct contact and home visits)—including an interpretation service.

¹⁰¹ Sw. "Utredningen pekar på behovet av särskilt stöd från samhället för att invandrarfamiljerna och deras barn skall kunna fungera på samma villkor som andra barnfamiljer här i landet. Det är betydelsefullt att invandrarbarnen kan lära sig svenska under förskoleperioden. Utredningen framhåller språkets betydelse i socialt och känslomässigt avseende. Språkundervisningen för invandrarbarn bör dock inte enbart bli en fråga om att lära ut svenska utan också att träna barnet i dess eget modersmål. Utredningen betonar att just modersmålsträningen är viktig vid inläringen av ett nytt språk. Det finns risk för att invandrarbarn inte lär sig att behärska vare sig sitt modersmål eller svenska språket fullständigt. Invandrarbarn bör i första hand placeras i vanliga förskolor men ibland kan andra former vara mer lämpliga."

lated in the bill was the image of immigrant children as contributing to Swedish children's development in preschool. The bill did not mention immigrant children (or parents) bringing knowledge about other cultures and languages to preschool from which Swedish children could benefit by obtaining a global view and becoming part of the international community.

The 1987 *Pedagogical Program*¹⁰²

In 1987, a *Pedagogical Program* for preschool was published. It was commissioned by the government. This newly formulated pedagogical program was produced because Parliament had approved a government bill entitled *Förskola för alla* (Eng. *Preschool for all*, Prop. 1984/85:209). The bill's decision was that all children from the age of 18 months should have a place in preschool, and this expansion should be ready by 1991. The reform meant that national principles for pedagogical content were now established in a centralized Pedagogical Program applicable to all preschools. The government agency responsible for preschool, Socialstyrelsen, was assigned to develop the program. It consisted of a 90-page publication with two main sections: the first about pedagogical activities and the second about the implementation of the program.

In the program, the terms immigrant children and Swedish children were not used as frequently as before. The term "immigrant" and its derivations appeared almost 20 times in the program. In addition, and this was new, the term "refugee" was added to earlier constructions; for example: "immigrant and refugee children," "immigrant and minority children," "immigrant, refugee and minority children," "immigrant and minority groups."¹⁰³ Other ways to refer to immigrants were "other cultures"¹⁰⁴ and "different cultures."¹⁰⁵ Gruber and Puskás (2013) describe the shift towards "culture" as being a result of a general turn in the policy discourse towards culturalization in general, and in relation to immigration in particular.

The two sections about pedagogical activities and the implementation of the program included the topic "children from different cultures," and covered between one and two pages each. In addition, one topic in the first section was "culture," with the subtopic "ways of living and traditions." I focus on what was presented in these three sections of the text.

¹⁰² Sw. "Pedagogiskt program."

¹⁰³ Sw. "invandrar- och flyktingbarn," "invandrar- och minoritetsbarn," "invandrar-, flykting-, och minoritetsbarn," "invandrar- och minoritetsgrupper." Support for the languages and cultures of minority children had been investigated in a government commission published in 1982, SOU 1982:43 *Language and culture support for immigrant and minority children*.

¹⁰⁴ Sw. "olika kulturer."

¹⁰⁵ Sw. "andra kulturer."

The topic “culture” in the section about pedagogical activities started with a description of culture as a broad concept that is subject to change, as shown in Example 13. At the same time, according to the program, culture is deeply rooted in society, in each family and each human being. Culture is part of “identity” and is “passed down from generation to generation” in the form of “cultural heritage.” The program said:

Example 13.

Culture is a *broad concept*. It is man-made traditions, views of life, rituals, life patterns, ways of expressing feelings and thoughts in words, images, music, dance, drama. These are formal and informal norms for human coexistence and cohabitation and more. The *culture varies from society to society and for different groups in society*. It is *passed down from generation to generation*, influenced and changed, but has *deep roots in society*, within every family and every human being—the *cultural heritage*. Culture is an important *part of identity*. (Socialstyrelsen, 1987, p. 30, my italics)¹⁰⁶

Hence, even though culture is “man-made,” it lives its own life to form human norms and ways of living. Culture is passed down, influenced and changed, at the same time as it has its own roots in human beings’ lives and identities. Even though it moves around and transforms, it is firmly rooted in the human world, in families and individuals. Hence, the program created an image of culture, when understood as “the cultural heritage,” in the singular, as something agentive, changeable and at the same time stable. Every family, individual and society was connected to a cultural heritage that was not particularly changeable. I argue that this was a very complicated way of explaining, indirectly, that Sweden had its own culture and cultural heritage that would not change easily.

As explained in the coming subtopic, “ways of living and traditions,” the explanation about culture was now developed in relation to immigrants and refugees. Culture was presented in both the singular and the plural, as in cultures, and also as being in constant flux, but with a deeply-rooted core:

Example 14.

Culture must be seen in *its historical context*. *Cultures are constantly evolving, but the core usually has very old and deep roots*. *The biggest and fastest cultural changes have taken place in our time* with rapidly changing living conditions and ways of life, as well as greatly increased communication *and mobility*

¹⁰⁶ Sw. “Kultur är ett vittomfattande begrepp. Det är av människor skapade traditioner, livsåskådningar, ritualer, levnadsmönster, sätt att uttrycka känslor och tankar i ord, bild, musik, dans, drama. Det är formella och informella normer för mänsklig samvaro och samlevnad med mera. Kulturen skiftar från samhälle till samhälle och för olika grupper i samhället. Den förs över från generation till generation, påverkas och förändras men har djupa rötter i samhället, inom varje familj och varje människa - kulturarvet. Kultur är en viktig del av identiteten.”

*between different cultures. The most readjustment to cultural change is undergone by many immigrants and refugees. Throughout the West, a transformation into a multicultural society is underway. This greatly affects the activities of preschool. (Socialstyrelsen, 1987, p. 30, my italics)*¹⁰⁷

The program, as also shown in Example 14, created an image of culture as something that is both stable and changing at the same time. There are many cultures involved in processes of change and transformation, but for immigrants and refugees this was described as a more demanding process than for “the West.” For immigrants and refugees, this cultural change meant a process of “readjustment.” However, the program did not specify what they were readjusting to. There was no goal for their readjustment. For people in “the West,” the goal was presented in positive terms, to transform “into a multicultural society.” The image presented in the program was thus that, for people living in the West, the situation was different from any historical experience, and also to some extent different from the experience of immigrants and refugees. However, people in the West did not need to readjust, only to become part of an ongoing process that was shared by the majority in the West, and with positive outcomes. Westerners did not need to change or transform away from their roots, in the way that, according to this image, and my interpretation, immigrants and refugees were forced to do.

One could say that Swedes, as part of the West, could continue to share an identity with their cultural heritage while immigrants and refugees must understand that they could not share an identity with their cultural heritage. If I relate it to the concept of belonging, the interpretation is that Swedes could continue to belong to their cultural heritage while immigrants and refugees needed to understand that they could no longer belong to their cultural heritage.¹⁰⁸ The dual image produced was of a culture forcing sameness and dif-

¹⁰⁷ Sw. “Kulturen måste ses i sitt historiska sammanhang. Kulturer utvecklas ständigt men kärnan har oftast mycket gamla och djupa rötter. De största och snabbaste kulturförändringarna har skett i vår tid med snabbt förändrade levnadsvillkor och levnadsformer samt en starkt ökad kommunikation och rörlighet mellan olika kulturer. Den mest omskakande kulturomställningen genomgår många invandrare och flyktingar. I hela västerlandet pågår förvandlingen till ett mångkulturellt samhälle. Detta påverkar i hög grad förskolans verksamhet.”

¹⁰⁸ This interpretation is supported by how preschool’s role in the lives of parents and children in general was described in the program. No parent could use their own experiences from childhood when raising their children since the pace of change had increased and was unprecedented: “The changes have been so rapid that children grow up in a society that is in many ways different from when their parents were children. It is therefore not certain that adults’ experiences of their own childhood can provide immediate insights into their children’s reality today. Children must be given the best possible conditions to grow up in this diverse and complicated society. They need help to get an overview, understand and put together a picture of life. [...] Children need support for the development of their ability to observe, think, discuss, think critically and form their own position. They need help to understand the meaning of our society’s core values and that everyone has a responsibility to shape and change society for the better” (Socialstyrelsen, 1987, p. 11). Sw. “Förändringarna har gått så snabbt att barn växer upp i ett samhälle som

ference at the same time. This dual image was the foundation for the pedagogical activities that all children in preschool were expected to take part in. Hence, the dual image that was founded in the 1970s was reproduced, but now in relation to the concept of culture.

Such a dual image could be interpreted as based on, and proposing, a relativistic image of culture. Cultures vary and are dependent on time and place. However, as shown in my analysis, the program did not offer similar discursive positions to people from different cultures. In fact, it proposed different discursive positions for Swedes and for immigrants. The culturally relativistic approach was, I argue, a rhetoric that produced a sense of inclusiveness, while at the same time reproducing and approving an image of immigrants' culture and roots as different from the culture and roots of the host society into which they were expected to integrate.

What I have described as a dual image producing difference was established in the pedagogical program as "culture-conscious work." The program explained the implications of such work in relation to "children from families from different cultures," and ended with an explanation of how such work "was of great importance for both Swedish children and children with other cultural and linguistic backgrounds":

Example 15.

Culture-conscious work in preschool helps children to eventually position themselves and their surroundings within a larger context. In preschool, children from families from different cultures meet different values and lifestyles. Habits and rules are not the same in all families. **The staff must strive to give the children a nuanced picture of and insight into different cultures, forms of cohabitation and ways of life.** Empathy and understanding of the characteristics of one's own and other cultures are of great importance for **both Swedish children and children with other cultural and linguistic backgrounds.** (Socialstyrelsen, 1987, p. 30, italics in original, my bold)¹⁰⁹

The text was open to interpretation regarding whose family's culture belonged to what values, norms, habits, rules and lifestyles. When relating this example

i mångt och mycket är annorlunda än då deras föräldrar var barn. Det är därför inte säkert att vuxnas erfarenheter av den egna barndomen kan ge omedelbara insikter om barnens verklighet idag. Barnen måste få bästa möjliga förutsättningar att växa upp i detta mångskiftande och komplicerade samhälle. De behöver hjälp att få överblick, förstå och foga ihop en bild av tillvaron. [...] Barn behöver stöd för utvecklingen av sin förmåga att iaktta, fundera, diskutera, tänka kritiskt och bilda en egen ståndpunkt. De behöver hjälp att förstå innebörden i vårt samhälles grundvärderingar och att alla har ett ansvar för att forma och förändra samhället till det bättre" (Socialstyrelsen, 1987, p. 11).

¹⁰⁹ Sw. "Kulturmedvetet arbete i förskolan hjälper barnen att så småningom sätta in sig själva och sin omgivning i ett större sammanhang. I förskolan möts barn från familjer ur olika kulturer med olika värderingar och levnadssätt. Vanor och regler är inte lika i alla familjer. Personalen måste sträva efter att ge barnen en nyanserad bild av och inblick i olika kulturer, samlevnadsformer och sätt att leva. Inlevelse i och förståelse för den egna och andra kulturernas särdrag har stor betydelse för såväl svenska barn som barn med annan kulturell och språklig bakgrund."

to the explanation of culture and cultures above, my interpretation is that the notion of culture as difference was established. This could be seen as a continuation of the 1970s theme, where both Swedish families and immigrant families were described, in different sections of the commission's report, as bound to traditions and values and where the role of preschool was to achieve change.

There was, however, a major difference in comparison with 1972. Back then, it was the immigrant children who brought with them competences that would benefit Swedish children in preschool, and the preschool itself, in acquiring general knowledge about other cultures. In the 1987 program, this had shifted to an expectation to be aspired to by practitioners. Now it was the practitioners who "must strive to give the children a nuanced picture of and insight into different cultures." To have empathy for and understanding of other cultures was equally as important for "Swedish children and children with other cultural and linguistic backgrounds." The positive image that immigrant children could contribute thanks to their cultural and linguistic background, which was expressed in 1972, was not rearticulated in the 1987 program. Instead, what was produced here was that all children belonged to "different cultures," but different groups of children were still singled out; Swedish children as one group and children with other languages and cultures as the other group.

In the section about how to implement the 1987 program, the "demands," as in 1972, were put on the practitioners. Similarly to the 1972 text, it was the practitioners who needed to understand the immigrants' experiences, but there were no such expectations of the immigrants themselves. It was also the practitioners who should "build" relationships of trust. As before, the notion that there was a clear difference between Swedish and other cultures was confirmed:

Example 16.

The meeting with children and parents from other cultures requires that the preschool staff—in addition to good knowledge—also encompass cultural awareness and insights into their own values. Staff should be aware that immigrants and refugees are in a situation where *they are in the minority. This leads to one's own culture becoming even more important and one may need to defend oneself against the majority society and its values. Parents' expectations of Swedish preschool do not always match what the preschool can offer.* It is important to *build a trusting contact* in order to be able to discuss values and expectations about the children's time at preschool in a mutual exchange. (Socialstyrelsen, 1987, p. 52, my italics)¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ Sw. "Mötet med barn och föräldrar från andra kulturer kräver hos förskolepersonalen - förutom goda kunskaper - också kulturell medvetenhet och insikter om egna värderingar. Personalen bör vara medveten om att invandrare och flyktingar befinner sig i en situation där de är i minoritet. Detta leder till att den egna kulturen blir ännu viktigare och man kan behöva värja sig mot majoritetssamhället och dess värderingar. Föräldrarnas förväntningar på svensk för-

It could be argued that the 1987 program deepened the notion of difference in relation to immigrant parents and preschool. The problem that the practitioners were expected to understand and solve was clearly that immigrant parents were not particularly interested in enrolling their children in preschool. The ones who came to preschool were depicted as people causing problems related to cultural differences, they wanted to stress the importance of their own culture and defend it (as well as themselves), and they had different expectations about what a Swedish preschool could offer. Indirectly, it was presented as a problem that the immigrants did not want to change, they did not want to integrate into the majority society. It was clear from the host society's point of view that, regardless of differences in values and cultures, the focus was on the children being in preschool.

The 1997 Government Commission's Report *To Conquer the Outside World*¹¹¹

The 1997 report by the government commission of inquiry investigated the conditions for preschool and suggested a curriculum for it for the first time in Swedish history. This report had two main sections; the first one addressing background and motivations and the second one about the actual proposal for a new curriculum (see below about the curriculum). In chapter three of the first section, the commissioners presented the motives for the proposal as central arguments. They listed eight such arguments as subtopics in the text. The fourth, about the possibilities of a multicultural society, is of interest when tracing the theme of migration in the state preschool political discourse. In the whole report, the terms "immigrant," "immigrant parents" and "immigrant children" were only sparsely used, as well as "other cultural,"¹¹² "different cultural,"¹¹³ "cultural diversity,"¹¹⁴ and "immigrant background."¹¹⁵ New expressions were used, however, when writing about immigrants, such as "dual

skola stämmer inte alltid med vad förskolan kan erbjuda. Det gäller att bygga upp en förtroendefull kontakt för att i ett ömsesidigt utbyte kunna diskutera värderingar och förväntningar kring barnens förskolevistelse."

¹¹¹ Sw. "Att erövrva omvärlden".

¹¹² Sw. "annan kulturell."

¹¹³ Sw. "olika kulturell."

¹¹⁴ Sw. "kulturell mångfald."

¹¹⁵ Sw. "invandrarbakgrund." As in 1972, Swedish families were again presented as gaining from preschool. In the context of presenting preschool in relation to all (Swedish) children, the commissioners wrote: "All families are different and each family has its own culture and traditions. It takes a lot of experience and knowledge from the preschool staff to be able to interpret and convey important information about the child that both the family and the staff need for good cooperation. [...] Children's social and cultural conditions in preschool have different signs than those prevailing in the parents' home. Modern conditions for growing up mean a

cultural belonging,”¹¹⁶ “children with another mother tongue than Swedish,”¹¹⁷ and “good bilingualism.”¹¹⁸

I now focus on argument number four, presented under the subtopic “Preschool in the multicultural society—equality—difference—opportunity.”¹¹⁹ According to the report, Sweden was “a multicultural society,” and immigration was “one of the clearest expressions of cultural diversity”:

Example 17.

*Sweden is a multicultural society. Immigration is one of the clearest expressions of cultural diversity. Every fifth resident in Sweden today has an immigrant background. Similarities and differences open up new possibilities, but this does not always happen automatically. There is no one-size-fits-all simple path to a society where everyone’s equal value and right to equality is self-evident. The ability to be sensitive to each other’s arguments and expressions, mutual respect, empathy and the ability to enter into each other’s situation, are fundamental to being able to meet and see the joy in cultural diversity. Traditional roles and values meet new ones, are reshaped and re-evaluated in an ongoing process. Preschool is a meeting place for both children and adults, it therefore plays a central role in how tolerance and solidarity develop between people and is an important part of a living democracy. (SOU 1997:157, p. 73, my italics)*¹²⁰

dual socialization for children, where preschool and home must both interact and be different arenas, where different roles are allowed and different conditions exist” pp. 59–60.

¹¹⁶ Sw. “dubbel kulturtillhörighet,” p. 128. Sw. “Förskolan skall bidra till att barn med ett annat modersmål än svenska får möjligheter att både lära sig svenska och att bibehålla och utveckla sitt modersmål samt att utveckla en dubbel kulturtillhörighet.” For Swedish children, dual socialization (Sw. dubbelsocialisering) was used to refer to how children should learn to be in the home and in preschool. There might be social and cultural differences between these environments, and this was part of a modern upbringing and modern processes of socialization (pp. 60, 128).

¹¹⁷ Sw. “barn med annat modersmål än svenska.”

¹¹⁸ Sw. “god tvåspråkighet,” “kvalificerad tvåspråkighet.”

¹¹⁹ Sw. “Förskolan i det mångkulturella samhället – likhet – olikhet – möjlighet.” The other lines of argument were: cooperation with parents and their influence, equality between the sexes, environmental work with children of preschool age, children’s right to culture, children in need of special support, multimedia and the importance of information technology, evaluation and quality development.

¹²⁰ Sw. “Sverige är ett mångkulturellt samhälle. Invandringen är ett av de tydligaste uttrycken för kulturell mångfald. Var femte invånare i Sverige har idag invandrarbakgrund. Likheter och olikheter öppnar nya möjligheter, detta sker inte alltid med given automatik. Det finns inte en men utstakad och enkel väg till ett samhälle där allas lika värde och rätt till olikhet är självklar. Förmåga till lyhördhet för varandras argument och uttryck, ömsesidig respekt, empati och inlevelseförmåga i varandras situation, är grundläggande för att kunna möta och se glädjen i kulturell mångfald. Traditionella roller och värderingar möter nya, omformas och omvärderas i en ständigt pågående process. Förskolan är en mötesplats för både barn och vuxna, den spelar därför en central roll för hur tolerans och solidaritet utvecklas mellan människor och är en viktig del i en levande demokrati.”

In Example 17, as in 1972, immigration was presented as something positive because it created a diverse society. Every fifth resident in Sweden was stated to have an immigrant background.¹²¹ As in 1987, meeting with immigrant children was portrayed as beneficial for Swedish children. Furthermore, the report underlined a concern about safeguarding diversity. The ability to “be sensitive to each other’s arguments and expressions” and to “see the joy in cultural diversity” was something that everybody should strive for. Preschool was “the meeting place” where such a perspective on society could be developed and manifested, the commissioners explained. Preschool was the basis for solidarity, tolerance and democracy, as also expressed in 1972.¹²² As in 1972, preschool was a positive agent in society’s efforts.

However, this text, and Example 18 below, also described how immigrants in segregated residential areas were at risk and how preschool could contribute to combatting “harassment, violence and xenophobia.” The notion of immigration as something positive shifted into a problem in the commission’s report, and “ethnic segregation” was mentioned for the first time:

Example 18.

Across the country, there are residential areas or parts of residential areas where a majority of the inhabitants are unemployed, dependent on benefits and live in socially difficult conditions. In these residential areas, *the proportion of immigrants is often significant*. Since almost half of the country’s immigrants have sought refuge in the metropolitan areas of Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö, *ethnic segregation is most evident in these areas. Applying to the group you feel most at home with, in culture, in religion, in language and in history, is understandable. It creates a sense of security and community in an often vulnerable*

¹²¹ In the bill dating from 1984/85, it was said that, in one generation, Sweden had “become an immigrant country” (Sw. “Sverige har dessutom under drygt en generation blivit ett invandrarnland”) (Prop. 1984/85:209, p. 5). Immigrants made up eight percent of the whole population, representing 130 languages. This had changed children’s circumstances when growing up, which had placed new demands on childcare and emphasized the role of childcare for children, meaning all children in Sweden. Preschool should both meet individual children’s needs and provide support for all children’s development: “It can provide knowledge and experiences of the outside world, convey a cultural heritage and lay the foundations for the children to find their way in our society. [...] In my opinion, childcare must now become a conscious focus, becoming part of a good upbringing environment for *all children*” (Prop. 1984/85:209, p. 5, italics in original). All children were entitled to active language stimulation, and preschool had a special responsibility in relation to certain children: “The preschool should *give all children* active language stimulation as well as basic concept formation that prepares [them for] reading, writing and arithmetic. The preschool has a special responsibility in this respect to children who come from linguistically or socially disadvantaged backgrounds” (Prop. 1984/85:209, p. 12, my italics).

¹²² In some motivations, there were citations from SOU 1972:26. To support their argument, the commissioners used a quote from a publication issued by *Save the Children*, stating that identity develops both individually and collectively and in relation to both sameness and difference. The difference that made “us” visible was a resource. Identity work was an ongoing and continuous process that “we” must train ourselves in.

situation, while at the same time it can create a breeding ground for isolation and exclusion. There is a risk that the lack of meetings and contact between different groups leads to suspicion and myths, fear and misunderstanding of each other. Stereotypical perceptions of how a certain group lives or what values govern that group can only be broken down through active efforts. *One of preschool's most important tasks is to use its opportunity as a social forum to combat all kinds of prejudice and discrimination. With goal-oriented work, preschool contributes to society's overall efforts against harassment, violence and xenophobia. (SOU 1997:157, p. 74, my italics)*¹²³

In Example 17, the reference to every fifth resident in Sweden being an immigrant created a positive image, while in Example 18 the number of immigrants in segregated areas was seen as “significant” and signaled problems. The commissioners used a reference to another government commissions’ report to back up their argument: *To grow up among concrete and huts* (SOU 1997:61).¹²⁴ In any case, this line of argument promoted a sense of understanding with the immigrants, and yet they were portrayed as causing a problem for Swedish society. The so-called reasonable and understandable choices that immigrants made, such as to seek safety, became a risk for society because the lack of meetings and interactions between different groups produced suspicious attitudes toward each other, and the growth of myths, fear and misunderstandings, as well as stereotyped views of different groups and the values to which they adhered. Thus, the mission for preschool was, and must be, as the commissioners stated, to use its social potential to “combat” all forms of “prejudice and discrimination.” Somehow, and indirectly, it gave the impression that the immigrants themselves were the cause of prejudice and discrimination. Active engagement and active efforts on the part of preschool were highlighted by the commissioners. However, active agency in their report was solely attributed to the preschool, which should be able to “use its opportunity,” “combat” and “contribute.”

¹²³ Sw. “Över hela landet finns det bostadsområden eller delar av bostadsområden där en majoritet av invånarna är arbetslösa, bidragsberoende och lever under socialt tunga villkor. I dessa bostadsområden är andelen invandrare ofta markant. Eftersom närmare hälften av landets invandrare sökt sig till storstadsområdena i Stockholm, Göteborg och Malmö är den etniska segregationen tydligast i dessa områden. Att söka sig till den grupp man känner sig mest hemma hos, i kultur, i religion, i språk, och i historia, är förståeligt. Det skapar en trygghet och gemenskap i en oftast utsatt situation, samtidigt som det kan skapa grogrund för isolering och utanförskap. Risker finns att bristen på möten och kontakt mellan olika grupper leder till misstänksamhet och myter, rädsla och oförståelse för varandra. Stereotypa uppfattningar hur viss en grupp lever eller vilka värderingar som styr gruppen, kan bara brytas genom aktiva insatser. En av förskolans viktigaste uppgifter är att använda sin möjlighet som socialt forum för att bekämpa alla sorters fördomar och diskriminering. Med målinriktat arbete medverkar förskolan till samhällets övergripande insatser mot trakasserier, våld och främlingsfientlighet.”

¹²⁴ Sw. “Att växa bland betong och kojor.” The bill continued with the same line of argument and suggested “that a preschool for all children aged 3–5 years should be set up as a pilot project for five years in the socially disadvantaged residential areas of the big cities” (Prop. 1997/98:93, p. 9).

Children, Parents and Practitioners

A section entitled “the first meeting with preschool” started by saying that preschool was “new for all children.” For children with an immigrant background, this meeting could also be “a first encounter with Swedish culture.” Hence, for such children, preschool was a new experience in a dual sense, and both experiences were supposed to be positive meetings—for the parents as well:

Example 19.

Starting preschool means something *new for all children*, and for *many children with an immigrant background*, preschool can also be *the first deeper encounter with Swedish culture*. Even for parents with an immigrant background, preschool can be *a first encounter with the Swedish language and Swedish culture*. Likewise, the start of preschool can mean *the first meeting with children from a different cultural background for Swedish children and their parents*. The staff’s awareness of their role based on their own ethnic background, and as a *cultural bridge*, as well as how a multicultural society is reflected in the preschool’s activities and environment, are all parts of a *multicultural way of working*. (SOU 1997:157, p. 74, my italics)¹²⁵

Example 20.

The *language has a foreign melody* that does not give the same feeling of security as one’s mother tongue, the food tastes different, the way of eating can be completely different. *There is a lot that can be foreign and difficult*. If the staff, with the help of body contact, closeness, warmth and care, succeed in getting in touch with immigrant children, the Swedes in preschool will also be positive role models alongside their parents. (SOU 1997:157, p. 74, my italics)¹²⁶

Example 20 echoes the cultural relativity discourse that was apparent ten years earlier in the pedagogical program, as shown in Example 14. In Example 20, the role of practitioners was again emphasized. While in Examples 19 and 21 they were described as a “cultural bridge”—a role previously ascribed to the

¹²⁵ Sw. “Att börja förskolan innebär något nytt för alla barn, för många men barn med invandrarbakgrund kan förskolan också bli det första djupare mötet med svensk kultur. Även för föräldrar med invandrarbakgrund kan förskolan bli ett första möte med det svenska språket och den svenska kulturen. Likaledes kan förskolestarten innebära det första mötet med barn från en annan kulturell bakgrund för svenska barn och deras föräldrar. Personalens medvetenhet sin roll utifrån sin egen etniska bakgrund, och som kulturöverbryggare, samt hur ett mångkulturellt samhälle återspeglas i förskolans verksamhet och miljö, är alla delar i ett mångkulturellt arbetssätt.”

¹²⁶ Sw. “Språket har en främmande melodi som inte inger samma känsla av trygghet som ens modersmål, maten smakar annorlunda, sättet att äta kan vara ett helt annat. Det är mycket som kan vara främmande och svårt. Om personalen med hjälp av kroppskontakt, närhet, värme och omsorg lyckas få kontakt med invandrarbarn blir även svenskarna i förskolan positiva förebilder vid sidan av föräldrarna.”

preschool alone—helping to sustain the multicultural society, in Example 20 they were instructed about how to become additional role models for immigrant children by showing an understanding of their fears and differences. Example 20 highlighted the importance of non-verbal forms of communication skills, which practitioners were encouraged to develop in order to provide the children with a feeling of security. It also showed how practitioners, and the Swedish way of doing things, could be seen as “foreign” and “difficult” from the perspective of immigrant children and parents.

In the following example, preschool was depicted as the only gateway for immigrant parents into Swedish society, one that they passed through on a daily basis. Here again, practitioners’ skills were highlighted when meeting parents at preschool. However, no expectations or demands were placed on the parents, other than simply coming to preschool:

Example 21.

The staff’s role as a *cultural bridge* between the child’s background and home environment, and Swedish society, is the basis for *a trusting and open approach in the meeting between different cultures*. For many parents with an immigrant background, preschool may be their only contact with Swedish society, and this contact takes place every day. Special knowledge of the history and contemporary conditions of different nationalities is *important knowledge for the staff*. *Insights into* cultural, religious and social characteristics can facilitate the understanding of children’s and parents’ overall living conditions and *expand activities in a positive way*. To expand the institutional practice is to allow both the Swedish and the multicultural in the preschool to be reflected in the environment and the content of the institutional practice. (SOU 1997:157, p. 76, my italics)¹²⁷

The commissioners then developed the idea that cultural diversity was an advantage in the preschool milieu. In a section entitled “everyone’s difference—everyone’s access,” they explained how an understanding of difference and sameness in relation to ethnicity can be obtained, because a one-sided focus on either sameness or difference was considered problematic:

Example 22.

In groups of children with many different ethnic backgrounds, the focus is often on similarities and differences based on ethnicity. It is equally important to see both aspects. Problems arise when either similarity or difference is unilaterally

¹²⁷Sw. “Personalens roll som kulturöverbryggare mellan barnets bakgrund och hemmiljö, och det svenska samhället, är grunden för ett förtroendefullt och öppet förhållningssätt i mötet mellan olika kulturer. För många föräldrar med invandrabakgrund kan förskolan vara den enda kontakten med det svenska samhället och denna kontakt sker varje dag. Speciella kunskaper om olika nationaliteters historia och nutidsförhållanden är viktiga kunskaper hos personalen. Insikter om kulturella, religiösa och sociala särdrag kan underlätta förståelsen för barns och föräldrars samlade livsvillkor och vidga verksamheten på ett positivt sätt. Att vidga verksamheten är att låta både det svenska och det mångkulturella i förskolan återspeglas i miljö och verksamhetsinnehåll.”

emphasized. Common examples of this are when the children's and parents' cultural background is highlighted on special occasions, usually in connection with certain holidays, cultural events or theme days. This reflects a desire to positively support the cultural characteristics and present different cultural backgrounds to each other. Despite the positive basic idea in this, there is a risk of "exoticization," where cultural features are emphasized on selected occasions and then again play a subordinate role in the institutional practice. (SOU 1997:157, p. 77)¹²⁸

The risk of "exoticization" was presented as a real danger that must be apprehended and resolved. In order to strengthen their arguments, the commissioners referred to another government commission's report, as well as to research conducted in the USA. Cultural and linguistic differences in preschool settings should be looked upon as a strength, while at the same time practitioners should refrain from making it seem exotic. However, it became equally problematic *not to* acknowledge cultural differences, because, according to the commissioners, the act of not emphasizing differences could be understood by the immigrant children and parents as an act of ignoring and shunning their ways of identifying themselves. The commissioners explained:

Example 23.

The opposite situation also exists. *The children's and parents' cultural characteristics* are toned down, or made invisible and instead the focus is on finding common features and similarities. This *reflects a concern of the staff*. The fear that differences lead to difficulties and an inability to create an understanding of each other's habits and culture makes one choose to smooth over what is different. The risk that children and *parents experience* a lack of identification and reflection in the activity is pronounced if difference is perceived too much as *a threat that must be limited*. (SOU 1997:157, p. 77, my italics)¹²⁹

Hence, singling out culture and ethnicity was considered just as much of a problem as not pointing out such differences at all. If that happened, it was because practitioners were apprehensive about how to handle the situation. If

¹²⁸ Sw. "I grupper med barn med många olika etniska bakgrunder fokuseras ofta på likheter och olikheter utifrån etnicitéet [sic]. Det är lika viktigt att se båda delarna. Problem uppstår när likhet eller olikhet ensidigt betonas. Vanliga exempel på detta är när barnens och föräldrarnas kulturella bakgrund lyfts fram vid speciella tillfällen, oftast i samband med vissa högtider, kulturevenemang och temadagar. Detta speglar en vilja att positivt stödja de kulturella särdragen och presentera olika kulturella bakgrunder för varandra. Trots den positiva grundtanken i detta finns det en risk för en "exotisering" där kulturella särdrag betonas vid utvalda tillfällen för att sedan åter spela underordnad roll i verksamheten."

¹²⁹ Sw. "Den motsatta situationen finns också. Barnens och föräldrarnas kulturella särdrag tonas ner, eller osynliggörs och istället fokuseras på att hitta gemensamma drag och likheter. Detta speglar en oro hos personalen. Rädslan för att olikheter leder till svårigheter och en oförmåga att skapa förståelse för varandras vanor och kultur gör att man väljer att släta över det som skiljer åt. Risken för att barn och föräldrar upplever en brist på identifikation och avspeglning i verksamheten är stor om olikhet alltför mycket upplevs som ett hot som måste begränsas."

they did not know how to properly approach the idea of the importance of preschool's role and function in a multicultural society, practitioners might allow a situation to develop in which neither children nor adults were able to identify the positive role of preschool. This was a new way of describing the role of practitioners—that they might actually be causing a problem for preschool. This criticism of unsavvy practitioners showed that preschool shared a similar interest with children and parents from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. It also echoes and reinforces the idea put forward in the 1970s that immigrants should be considered an asset to preschool, as well as the idea from the same period about the importance of acknowledging and handling differences.

In the report's conclusion, given in Example 24, the commissioners repeated that growing internationalization placed “new demands on everybody,” and that preschool could serve as a bridge and meeting place where a balance could be created between similarities and differences:

Example 24.

In conclusion, the Committee believes that increased mobility across national borders and growing internationalization place new demands on everyone. Preschool is a meeting place for both children and adults, it therefore has a great opportunity to function as a positive cultural bridge between people with ethnic, cultural, social and religious differences. The multicultural preschool must be reflected in both activities and the environment. But preschool also has a responsibility not to focus unilaterally on only ethnic differences between people. A multicultural way of working can also include work based on, for example, social, geographical, physical and familial similarities and differences. (SOU 1997:157, p. 77)¹³⁰

In the bill presenting the commissioners' proposal and recommendations to Parliament, the discussion about sameness and difference was downplayed.

The 1998 Bill *Preschool for All Children*¹³¹

The government bill advancing the idea for a curriculum demonstrates an adherence to the commissioners' view on immigration and preschool. Like the

¹³⁰ Sw. “Sammanfattningsvis menar kommittén att den ökade rörligheten över nationsgränsema och den växande internationaliseringen ställer nya krav på alla. Förskolan är en mötesplats för både barn och vuxna, oss den har därför en stor möjlighet att fungera som en positiv kulturöverbryggare mellan människor med etniska, kulturella, sociala och religiösa olikheter. Den mångkulturella förskolan skall återspeglas i både verksamhet och miljö. Men förskolan har också ett ansvar att inte ensidigt fokusera på enbart etnisk olikhet mellan människor. Ett mångkulturellt arbetssätt kan också innefatta arbete utifrån exempelvis sociala, geografiska, fysiska, och familjemässiga likheter och olikheter.”

¹³¹ Sw. “Förskola för alla barn.”

commissioners' report, the bill only occasionally used the terms "the immigrant children's,"¹³² "children with an immigrant background,"¹³³ "dual cultural belonging,"¹³⁴ "children with another mother tongue than Swedish,"¹³⁵ and "bilingualism."¹³⁶ There was no mention of "immigrant parents" or "immigrant families."

The bill opened with a description of its mission and propositions about how the laws needed to be changed in order to support the curriculum. Before the actual curriculum was presented, there was a section about motivations and starting points for this proposal. It was explained that the municipalities and the state had expanded childcare according to prior plans, which had now been "implemented." This explanation was contextualized in relation to the general Nordic and Swedish welfare policy with its focus on full-day care and quality, and there was a clear focus on the role played by preschool for "the vast majority of children today":

Example 25.

The expansion of childcare has entailed a major commitment for the state and the municipality, which has now in principle been implemented. The Nordic model for all-day care of good quality is of crucial importance for the general welfare policy and a prerequisite for equality between women and men and children's good conditions for growing up. [...] The Government considers that it is now important to develop preschool's internal work and strengthen and clarify its pedagogical role. This means a shift in perspective that it is both important and possible to make, since preschool can be offered to the vast majority of children today through goal-oriented and successful work. In addition, societal development places increasing demands on the development of knowledge and competence for the individual, which can already be founded in preschool. [...] On the other hand, this means that the pedagogical child perspective becomes clearer—that preschool should primarily be for the child's own care, development and learning. [...] This bill deals with issues concerning preschool for children aged 1–5 years. [...] The pedagogical content becomes visible and accessible to everyone who is affected by preschool's activities. (Prop. 1997/98:93, p. 8, my italics)¹³⁷

¹³² Sw. "invandrarbarnens."

¹³³ Sw. "barn med invandrarbakgrund."

¹³⁴ Sw. "dubbel kulturtillhörighet."

¹³⁵ Sw. "barn med annat modersmål än svenska."

¹³⁶ Sw. "tvåspråkighet."

¹³⁷ Sw. "Utbyggnaden av barnomsorgen har inneburit ett stort åtagande för stat och kommun som nu i princip är genomfört. Den nordiska modellen för en heldagsomsorg med god kvalitet är av avgörande betydelse för den generella välfärdspolitiken och en förutsättning för jämställdhet mellan kvinnor och män och barns goda uppväxtvillkor. [...] Regeringen anser att det nu är viktigt att utveckla förskolans inre arbete och förstärka och tydliggöra förskolans pedagogiska roll. Detta innebär en perspektivförskjutning som är både viktig och möjlig att göra, eftersom förskolan genom ett målinriktat och framgångsrikt arbete i dag kan erbjudas det stora flertalet barn. Dessutom ställer samhällsutvecklingen ökande krav på en kunskaps- och kompetensutveckling för individen som kan grundläggas redan i förskolan. [...] Däremot innebär det att det

The mention of the Nordic model and its welfare policy was probably due to Sweden's recent accession (1995) to the European Union (EU). The all-day care model was not used in the rest of the EU, and was framed as a role model, together with preschool's contribution to increased equality (see Lindgren & Söderlind, 2019). Moreover, the bill motivated the implementation of a curriculum as an advancement for most children in Swedish society aged between one and five years. This was also expressed in a way that made the government an active agent. It was the government that "considered" what was being described as a "shift in perspective" towards preschool with a focus on pedagogical and goal-oriented work. Preschool's role in fulfilling the new demands for knowledge and competence posed by society's development was accentuated. Hence, preschool became a tool for the development of both children and society. Example 25 shows how a new term was introduced: "the pedagogical child perspective," in addition to the less specific and more generally used "child perspective." This new concept was used to highlight the relationships between individual children and their relationship to and dependence on preschool to be cared for, developed and taught.

According to the bill, there was a "risk"—not for individual children, but for certain groups of children—if preschool did not provide them with the necessary support. Examples of such groups were "children with an immigrant background and children in socially vulnerable areas":

Example 26.

The government takes it seriously that certain groups of children, for whom preschool could be a great support, risk not receiving it at all. This may apply to children with an immigrant background and children in socially vulnerable areas with high unemployment, which entails a serious risk of increased segregation. [...] The Committee [The Metropolitan Committee, my note] proposes that a preschool for all children aged 3–5 years should be set up as a pilot project for five years in the socially disadvantaged housing areas in the big cities. [...] A general preschool for all children from an early age is a wish that many want to see come true. The government perceives this as a sign that the value of preschool for children's care, development and learning has gained recognition. The government believes that preschool should be offered to all children. Without increased resources, however, it is not possible to introduce a general preschool while maintaining good quality. (Prop. 1997/98:93, p. 9, my italics)¹³⁸

pedagogiska barnperspektivet blir tydligare – att förskolan i första hand skall vara till för barnets egen omsorg, utveckling och lärande. [...] I denna proposition behandlas frågor som rör förskola för barn i åldern 1-5 år. [...] Det pedagogiska innehållet blir synligt och tillgängligt för alla som berörs av förskolans verksamhet."

¹³⁸ Sw. "Regeringen ser allvarligt på att vissa grupper av barn, för vilka förskolan skulle kunna vara ett stort stöd, riskerar att inte alls få del av den. Det kan gälla barn med invandrarbakgrund och barn i socialt utsatta områden med hög arbetslöshet, vilket innebär en allvarlig risk för ökad segregation. [...] Kommittén [Storstadskommittén, min anm] föreslår att en förskola för alla

Hence, the bill rearticulated the ideas from the 1970s that immigrant children were in special need of support from preschool. Nonetheless, a difference existed in the two texts; children in sparsely populated areas who, in the 1970s, were stated to be at risk if they did not attend preschool, were not mentioned in the 1990s bill. Instead, new problematic geographical contexts appeared: the “socially vulnerable areas with high unemployment, which entails a serious risk of increased segregation.” The bill referred to another government commission’s report, *the Metropolitan Commission* (SOU 1997:118), to argue for this, instead of referring to the government commission’s report from 1997 (which also referred to the Metropolitan Commission). It is worth mentioning that the 1990s bill did not express the same kind of empathy or understanding with immigrants living in such areas as the government commission’s report did (see above).

The bill also made an addition when including the suggestion from the Metropolitan Commission to set up a pilot project with preschool “for all children aged 3–5 years [...] in the socially disadvantaged housing areas in the big cities.” I interpret this as an indirect way of highlighting the special needs of immigrant children, because “for all children” was articulated in a context where “immigrant background” and “disadvantaged housing areas” were connected to each other. As in the 1970s, a special solution for immigrant children was proposed. In the 1990s, this was proposed in a context where a general offer “to all children,” as in all children in Sweden, was considered desirable but impossible to implement due to a lack of resources.¹³⁹

It was also clear that the government was now an active agent in the process. The government “took it seriously,” it “perceived” and it “believed.”

...and the Curriculum in the Bill

So far, I have presented the motivation and explanation for implementing a curriculum in preschool for the first time. The curriculum itself was presented in an attachment. The body-text of the bill gave motivations for how the curriculum was structured and supported its content. The topic about structure started with a brief historical recap and was summarized by pointing out how the curriculum manifested a new way for the State to govern the pedagogical content in preschool:

barn i åldern 3-5 år skall inrättas som en försöksverksamhet under fem år i de socialt utsatta bostadsområdena i storstäderna. [...] En allmän förskola för alla barn från tidig ålder är ett önskemål som många vill se förverkligat. Regeringen uppfattar detta som ett tecken på att förskolans värde för barns omsorg, utveckling och lärande har vunnit erkänsla. Regeringen anser att det finns mycket som talar för att förskolan borde erbjudas alla barn. Utan ökade resurser är det dock inte möjligt att med bibehållen god kvalitet införa en allmän förskola.”

¹³⁹ Referring to general preschool implied that preschool was a right and free of charge.

Example 27.

The preschool's pedagogical activities have thus never before been governed by a curriculum in the form of an ordinance. Until now, the state's control over preschool, in addition to legislation, has mainly consisted of advice and recommendations to the municipalities, which themselves have formulated their own guidelines for activities. (Prop. 1997/98:93, p. 14)¹⁴⁰

The topic addressing the content of the curriculum had subheadings, concerning: "Norms and values," "Care, play and learning," "Children's influence," "Preschool and the home," and "Cooperation." In the report, society was presented as multicultural (Example 17), while the bill presented preschool as multicultural: "In the multicultural preschool, there are opportunities for children to establish respect and esteem for every human being, regardless of background" (Prop. 1997/98:93, p. 20).¹⁴¹

The conceptualization of Sweden as an increasingly international society with increased mobility was reinforced in the bill. As in the 1970s, practitioners should be able to empathize with differences and values. Now, preschool was presented as "multicultural":

Example 28.

The internationalization of Swedish society and the growing mobility across national borders place high demands on *preschool staff's ability to understand and inhabit the conditions and values of others*. In the multicultural preschool, there are opportunities for children to establish respect and esteem for every human being, *regardless of background*. (Prop. 1997/98:93, p. 20, my italics)¹⁴²

In Example 29, we find references to background differences—which could be applied to anybody—rather than the cultural, ethnic or linguistic differences that were mentioned in other texts. Here, the idea of an inclusive preschool as a place for diversity to thrive was communicated. But, in spite of this inclusive idea, a difference between Swedish children and other children existed in the text; *children* in the first sentence can be interpreted as Swedish children because they were offered opportunities to take part in "their own cultural heritage as well as the culture of the minority and immigrant children," while *children* in the following sentences refers to children in general:

¹⁴⁰ Sw. "Förskolans pedagogiska verksamhet har således aldrig tidigare styrts av en läroplan i form av en förordning. Statens styrning av förskolan har hittills, förutom lagstiftning, främst utgjorts av råd och rekommendationer till kommunerna, som själva utformat egna riktlinjer för verksamheten."

¹⁴¹ Sw. "I den mångkulturella förskolan finns möjligheter för barnen att grundlägga respekt och aktning för varje människa oavsett bakgrund."

¹⁴² Sw. "Det svenska samhällets internationalisering och den växande rörligheten över nationsgränserna ställer höga krav på förskolepersonalens förmåga att förstå och leva sig in i andras villkor och värderingar. I den mångkulturella förskolan finns möjligheter för barnen att grundlägga respekt och aktning för varje människa oavsett bakgrund."

Example 29.

Preschool must also give children opportunities to take part in society's cultural offerings, *their own cultural heritage as well as the culture of the minority and immigrant children*. In the multicultural preschool there are children with different backgrounds. Strengthening children's identity is an important task in preschool, as well as developing their empathy and respect for differences between people. (Prop. 1997/98:93, p. 22, my italics)¹⁴³

The idea presented in the example above shows that expectations are also placed on children, as well as practitioners, to develop "empathy" and "respect" for "differences." Preschool is depicted as the place where such a development could happen. When talking about the role of cooperation between preschool and home, parents were a general category and ethnic or other differences were not singled out:

Example 30

Modern conditions for growing up mean a life for children where preschool and home must work together and be different arenas for the children. Preschool has an important place in children's education and learning. Parental cooperation is a basic starting point for preschool activities. Collaboration between home and preschool should be based on openness, reciprocity and respect. In preschool, *parents and staff have continuing conversations* about the child's development and learning. *Parental collaboration and parental influence* also mean that there is a discussion between preschool and home about the *planning and implementation* of the preschool's activities. *Different children, different situations and different parents require different approaches on the part of the staff*. (Prop. 1997/98:93, p. 24, my italics)¹⁴⁴

Hence, cooperation with parents was highlighted as important for the children's experience of preschool as a positive encounter. When in preschool, both practitioners and parents were expected to communicate with each other, to collaborate, and the parents were entitled to influence and be involved in the planning and implementation of activities. Because of the existing diversity in preschool—children, situations, parents—no particular group was singled out. This diversity did not apply to the practitioners, however, which can

¹⁴³ Sw. "Förskolan skall även ge barnen möjligheter att ta del av såväl samhällets kulturutbud, det egna kulturarvet som minoriteternas och invandrabarnens kultur. I den mångkulturella förskolan finns barn med olika bakgrunder. Att stärka barns identitet är ett viktigt uppdrag i förskolan, liksom att utveckla barns inlevelseförmåga och respekt för olikheter mellan människor."

¹⁴⁴ Sw. "Moderna uppväxtvillkor innebär en tillvaro för barn där förskola och hem skall samverka och vara olika arenor för barnen. Förskolan har en viktig del i barnens fostran och lärande. Föräldrasamarbetet är en grundläggande utgångspunkt för förskolans verksamhet. Samverkan mellan hem och förskola skall bygga på öppenhet, ömsesidighet och respekt. I förskolan har föräldrar och personal kontinuerliga samtal om barnets utveckling och lärande. Föräldrasamarbetet och föräldrainflytande innebär också att det mellan förskola och hem förs en diskussion om planering och genomförande av förskolans verksamhet. Olika barn, olika situationer och olika föräldrar kräver olika förhållningssätt från personalens sida."

be interpreted as meaning that they represented the same thing, Swedish preschool, as a reflection of Swedish society (which was also, as described in many documents, multicultural). Depicting everybody as different, except for the practitioners, even though they applied different approaches, produced an ambiguous picture of preschool as simultaneously culturally hegemonic and diverse. There was, however, an attempt made to give an active role to immigrant parents in preschool, which did not exist in earlier writings. Still, this active role was decided by the approach used by the practitioner, depending on the situation.

The First Curriculum, Revisions and a New Curriculum

I now briefly present the first curriculum (Regeringskansliet, 1998) and the revisions that followed (Skolverket, 2006, 2011, 2016) after the bill. My focus is on immigrants.¹⁴⁵ The curriculum started with a section about “Preschool’s fundamental values and mission.”¹⁴⁶ Then followed goals to strive for and guidelines, with the subtopics: “Norms and values,” “Development and learning,” “Children’s influence,” “Preschool and home,” and “Cooperation between the preschool class, the school and out of school care.”¹⁴⁷ The curriculum addressed “parents” and “guardians,” hence there was no mention of “immigrant parents” or similar categorizations.¹⁴⁸ The examples I have singled out below all come from the section about preschool’s fundamental values and mission and the subsection “Preschool and home.”

As shown in the examples below, the revisions from 2006, 2011 and 2016 made no changes regarding the perception of immigrants. In the new curriculum of 2018, some changes were made, in addition to the significant shift that preschool was now defined as *education* and not an institutional practice.¹⁴⁹

Cultural Diversity and Internationalization

The idea that preschool played a role as a tool in the process of increased cultural diversity and in relation to internationalization was emphasized in the curriculum. In preschool, children with different backgrounds could meet and develop “respect” and “esteem” towards the whole of humanity since preschool was a “social and cultural meeting place,” as shown in the curriculum:

¹⁴⁵ I have excluded the sections of the text referring to values of anti-discrimination where ethnicity was mentioned.

¹⁴⁶ Sw. “Förskolans värdegrund och uppdrag.”

¹⁴⁷ Sw. “Normer och värden,” “Utveckling och lärande,” “Barns inflytande,” “Förskola och hem,” and “Samverkan mellan förskoleklassen, skolan och fritidshemmet.”

¹⁴⁸ Sw. “föräldrar,” “vårdnadshavare.”

¹⁴⁹ Sw. “utbildning,” “förskolans verksamhet.”

Example 31.

The growing mobility across national borders creates *cultural diversity in preschool*, which gives children opportunities to establish respect and esteem for every human being, regardless of background. (Regeringskansliet, 1998, p. 7; Skolverket, 2006, p. 4; Skolverket, 2011, p. 4; Skolverket, 2016, p. 4, my italics)¹⁵⁰

Example 32.

The internationalization of Swedish society places high demands on people's ability to live with and understand the values that lie in *cultural diversity*. The preschool is a *social and cultural meeting place* that can strengthen this ability and prepare children for a life in an *increasingly internationalized society*. ***Awareness of one's own cultural heritage and participation in the culture of others should*** contribute to the children developing their *ability to understand and live in the conditions and values of others*. Preschool can contribute to children belonging to the national minorities and *children with a foreign background receiving support in developing a multicultural affiliation*. (Regeringskansliet, 1998, p. 9; Skolverket, 2006, p. 5; Skolverket, 2011, p. 6; Skolverket, 2016, p. 6; Skolverket, 2018, pp. 5–6, my italics and bold)¹⁵¹

Example 33.

Preschool's mission includes developing children's abilities and *children's own cultural creation* as well as *transferring a cultural heritage*—values, traditions and history, language and knowledge—*from one generation to the next*

¹⁵⁰ Sw. “Den växande rörligheten över nationsgränserna skapar en kulturell mångfald i förskolan, som ger barnen möjligheter att grundlägga respekt och aktning för varje människa oavsett bakgrund.”

¹⁵¹ Sw. “Det svenska samhällets internationalisering ställer höga krav på människors förmåga att leva med och förstå de värden som ligger i en kulturell mångfald. Förskolan är en social och kulturell mötesplats som kan stärka denna förmåga och förbereda barnen för ett liv i ett alltmer internationaliserat samhälle. **Medvetenhet om det egna kulturarvet** och delaktighet i andras kultur ska bidra till att barnen utvecklar sin förmåga att förstå och leva sig in i andras villkor och värderingar. Förskolan kan bidra till att barn som tillhör de nationella minoriteterna och barn med utländsk bakgrund får stöd i att utveckla en flerkulturell tillhörighet.” In the 1998 curriculum, *multicultural affiliation* was described as “double cultural affiliation,” Sw. “dubbel kulturtillhörighet.” In Lpfö18, the sentence about awareness was replaced with: “*knowledge of different living conditions and cultures*.” Hence, there was a shift from being aware of differences to knowing about them. The role “of cultural heritage and to participate in the culture of others” was replaced with “having knowledge about differences in living conditions and cultures.” Also a change: “*Preschool education should lay the foundations for children's understanding of different languages and cultures, including the languages and cultures of national minorities*.” Sw. “**Kännedom om olika levnadsförhållanden** och kulturer kan bidra till att utveckla en förmåga att förstå och leva sig in i andra människors villkor och värderingar. Utbildningen i förskolan ska lägga grunden för barnens förståelse för olika språk och kulturer, inklusive de nationella minoriteternas språk och kulturer” (Skolverket, 2018, pp. 5–6).

(Regeringskansliet, 1998, p. 9; Skolverket, 2006 p. 5; Skolverket, 2011, p. 6; Skolverket, 2016, p. 6; Skolverket, 2018, p. 9, my italics).¹⁵²

Hence, the curriculum did not single out immigrant children as a specific group. The text addressed all children in preschool as children with different backgrounds, i.e. not as Swedish children or immigrant children, as in the 1970s and 1980s. It was a discourse of inclusion. The implicit message was that, for everyone, meeting differences was a way to build respect. It was the cultural diversity in preschool that provided children with a rich environment for the opportunity to develop respect. However, it was not said, as it was in the government commission reports from the 1970s and 1990s, that it was immigrant children who provided the cultural diversity for the enrichment of Swedish children.

Here, in Example 31, it was cultural diversity itself that became the active element. In addition, the curriculum acknowledged children as both creators of culture and having a role in transferring “a cultural heritage” between generations, as shown in Example 33. This demonstrates how the curriculum could position “children,” as a general category, as active agents in relation to culture when in preschool.

However, when the document talked about “children with a foreign background,” as in Example 32, they were not presented as so active. These children “received support” to enable them to develop “a multicultural affiliation.” However, this shifted in the new 2018 curriculum: the phrase “children with a foreign background” was replaced with a reference to children’s different languages and cultures, and their belonging to a “multicultural affiliation” was also replaced. Hence, in 2018, the curriculum increased its use of an inclusive address and downplayed notions of cultural belonging as something specific and related to “others.” All children were included in the group who were expected to understand and acknowledge differences in languages and cultures.

This might be interpreted as a way of positioning immigrant children as *not* being forced to choose one belonging—they could belong to more than one culture, as presented in Example 14, above. However, up until 2018, a less positive interpretation is also possible; that children with a foreign background were in need of support to establish a dual belonging. Swedish children, who did not have a foreign background, did not need such extra support. To belong

¹⁵² Sw. “I förskolans uppdrag ingår att såväl utveckla barns förmågor och *barns eget kulturskapande* som att *överföra ett kulturarv* – värden, traditioner och historia, språk och kunskaper – från en generation till nästa.” In the 2018 revision it was added that: “The preschool must also ensure that different cultures are made visible in the education.” Sw. “Förskolan ska också se till att olika kulturer synliggörs i utbildningen.” Children should also learn to show an interest, and take part, in the local cultural life (pp. 14, 15). Sw. “i det lokala kulturlivet,” which were additions to the previous curriculum texts.

to, and take part in, cultural diversity was not something that Swedish children needed extra support to be able to deal with. To receive support was different from creating and transferring culture, as expressed in Examples 31 and 33. To receive was, I argue, to be active in a less autonomous way. Hence, the curriculum took a dual approach. When included in the category “children,” immigrant children were active but, when included in the category “children with a foreign background,” immigrant children needed extra support. Hence, a dual approach was reinscribed into the new curriculum.

The curriculum also had specific goals for giving children “with a mother tongue other than Swedish” the opportunity to learn both the language of the host society and their mother tongue. This was said firstly with reference to the Education Act¹⁵³ and secondly as a goal for each child to develop:

Example 34.

The Education Act states that preschool shall contribute to children with a mother tongue other than Swedish being given the opportunity to develop both the Swedish language and their mother tongue. (Regeringskansliet, 1998, p. 10; Skolverket, 2006, p. 6; Skolverket, 2011, p. 6; Skolverket, 2016, p. 7, section on preschool’s mission)¹⁵⁴

Example 35.

[Each child who has a mother tongue other than Swedish]

– [develops] their cultural identity and their ability to communicate both in Swedish and in their mother tongue. (Skolverket, 2006, p. 9; Skolverket, 2011, p. 11; Skolverket, 2016, p. 10, section on goals).¹⁵⁵

– [The preschool must give each child the conditions to develop] both the Swedish language and their mother tongue, if the child has a mother tongue other than Swedish. (Skolverket, 2018, p. 14).¹⁵⁶

Hence, immigrant children were not presented as having special needs in relation to learning how to communicate in Swedish and in their mother tongue. The goal was to develop their own cultural identity, which means that these children could belong to more than one culture. However, in addition to having a “foreign background,” “mother tongue” became a term to define and categorize immigrant children.

¹⁵³ SFS 2010:800.

¹⁵⁴ Sw. “Av skollagen framgår att förskolan ska medverka till att barn med annat modersmål än svenska får möjlighet att utveckla både det svenska språket och sitt modersmål.” This same quotation exists in the 1998 curriculum without mentioning the Education Act.

¹⁵⁵ Sw. [Varje barn som har ett annat modersmål än svenska] [utvecklar:] “sin kulturella identitet och sin förmåga att kommunicera såväl på svenska som på sitt modersmål.”

¹⁵⁶ Sw. [Förskolan ska ge varje barn förutsättningar att utveckla] ”både det svenska språket och sitt modersmål, om barnet har ett annat modersmål än svenska”

Preschool and Home

In the section addressing “Preschool and home,” guardians and parents were addressed directly. During this period, there was a shift towards using the term guardian more often than parent. Hence, parents and guardians were addressed as such, regardless of background or origins. When describing the relationship between preschool and parents/guardians, the opportunity to develop a “close and trusting” collaboration was emphasized throughout the period. In the new 2018 curriculum, there was a stronger focus on the child than before, as shown when comparing Examples 36 and 37:

Example 36.

Preschool’s work with the children must therefore take place in close and trusting collaboration with the parents. Parents must be able to participate in and influence the activities of the preschool within the framework of the national goals. It is therefore a prerequisite that the preschool is clear in terms of its goals and content to enable the children’s and parents’ opportunity for influence. (Regeringskansliet, 1998, p. 15; Skolverket, 2006, p. 11; Skolverket, 2011, p. 13; Skolverket, 2016, p. 13)¹⁵⁷

Example 37.

In order to create the best possible conditions for children to be able to develop in a rich and versatile manner, the preschool must cooperate in a close and trusting way with the [children’s] homes. (Skolverket, 2018, p. 17)¹⁵⁸

Practitioners should show respect for parents and be responsible for the development of a trusting relationship between themselves and the children’s families. This included providing a “good introduction” for both parents/guardians and children to the preschool, and to inform them about the preschool’s mission and ways of working.¹⁵⁹

In my interpretation, parents were granted both an active and a more passive position in the different revisions. For example, between 1998 and 2016, it was said that practitioners should “take the parents’ views into account when planning and implementing activities,” which gave the parents an agentive status, i.e. their points of view should become visible in the activities (Regeringskansliet, 1998, p. 16).¹⁶⁰ In the 2018 curriculum, this was expressed

¹⁵⁷ Sw. “Förskolans arbete med barnen skall därför ske i ett nära och förtroendefullt samarbete med föräldrarna. Föräldrarna skall ha möjlighet att inom ramen för de nationella målen vara med och påverka verksamheten i förskolan. Att förskolan är tydlig i fråga om mål och innehåll är därför en förutsättning för barnens och föräldrarnas möjlighet till inflytande.”

¹⁵⁸ Sw. “För att skapa bästa möjliga förutsättningar för att barnen ska kunna utvecklas rikt och mångsidigt ska förskolan samarbeta på ett nära och förtroendefullt sätt med hemmen.”

¹⁵⁹ Sw. “god introduktion.”

¹⁶⁰ Sw. “beakta föräldrarnas synpunkter när det gäller planering och genomförande av verksamheten.”

as something the guardians were “given”: the “guardians are given the opportunity to participate in the evaluation of the education” (Skolverket, 2018, p. 17).¹⁶¹

A Lexical Analysis of the Categorical Representation of the Immigrant Child and Immigrant Parents

In this section, I demonstrate how immigrant children and parents were constructed in the abovementioned documents. The focus this time is on the lexical and grammatical constructions that were used in the texts.

The Immigrant Child

During the periods examined, different terms were used to designate these children. Initially, there was a tendency to categorize them, but this trend faded away in later decades. Furthermore, during earlier periods, the writing was centered on immigrant children, while in the later periods it was more centered on the preschool.

The high number of immigrants increased the demands on municipalities during the 1970s. The commissioners’ report defined the problem with immigration as a communication, information and language problem. Defining the problem allowed the commissioners to start by defining immigrant children and the solutions to the problem. Various words were used with various degrees of frequency to frame the problem and strengthen the arguments. Such words were: increase, need, help, dependent, risk, support, special needs, language, class borders, mother tongue, Swedish language, child’s linguistic ability, two half languages, integration and good supervision of the immigrant child, worse starting position, need extra support, disabled children, special difficulties and language teaching. The verbs combined with the immigrant child in these earlier documents were often presented in passive forms, such as: are included, channeled, trained to communicate, trained to express, placed and transferred. Active forms were also used, such as: the immigrant children provide a positive experience, function on the same terms, receive help to acquire, learn, experience, help the child, affect the immigrant child, encounters, learn Swedish and do not learn to master.

The measures that were suggested in the pedagogical program of the 1980s focused less on immigration and more on culture. Less focus was also placed on the immigrant children themselves and more emphasis was laid on the preschool and the recommended methods for dealing with immigrants in general.

¹⁶¹ Sw. “vårdnadshavare ges möjlighet att vara delaktiga i utvärderingen av utbildningen.”

Terms such as immigrant child/children were substituted by children of families from different cultures, children with other cultural and linguistic backgrounds and children from other cultures. Words often combined with these terms were: empathy, understanding and meeting, and words with negative connotations, such as risk and difficulties, were more or less abandoned. Passive verb forms were not used in combination with immigrant children.

The word risk re-emerged in the 1990s policy document, and a new problem was framed. This problem was not attributed to languages and communication, but rather to residential segregation that reduced the opportunities for meetings between different groups. New terms were used to refer to immigrant children, such as children with an immigrant background and children in socially vulnerable areas with high unemployment, children with many different ethnic backgrounds, children with different backgrounds, children with a foreign background and, an old one that reappeared, immigrant children. Words associated with these terms were: preschool, first deeper encounter with Swedish culture, similarities and differences, cultural background, cultural characteristics, lack of identification and culture.

Thus, immigration became less and less important in defining these children, while cultural and ethnic difference became the new way of referring to them. The differentiation between Swedish children and immigrant children that was prevalent in documents from earlier periods gradually faded away in documents from later periods. The curriculum for Swedish preschool, since its first appearance until today, has described these children as children with other mother tongues than Swedish. Immigration and culture became less pronounced. However, the newest curriculum states that no preschool child should be subjected to discrimination due to sex, ethnic belonging, religion, disability, sexual orientation or age. Verbs referring to these children were: learn, maintain, develop and gain.

The analysis shows that, in earlier documents, immigrant children occupied the foreground in the texts while later on they became part of the background description of preschool. This reflects the more inclusive approach towards these children that was adopted in later decades.

Immigrant Parents

In earlier writings, immigrant parents were referred to in the context of needing help from Swedish society, as well as to their inability to stimulate their child's linguistic ability to express him/herself in the mother tongue. Words combined with immigrant parents were: religious affiliation, views on upbringing, relationship between man and woman being different from Swedish values, causing conflicts and confrontation, collaboration, developed gradually, preschool's goals, conversation, perceive the preschool's program, defend themselves and parents' values in the home situation. Immigrant parents

were not mentioned in the governmental bills from earlier periods. In the pedagogical program of the 1980s, immigrant parents were described as parents from other cultures, and some of the words associated with them were: expectations, mutual exchange and trusting contact. In the 1990s, they were defined in the commissioners' writings as parents with an immigrant background, and they were described, not in relation to their participation in the processes (via verbs), but in relation to a circumstance (via nominalization) such as their: first encounter with the Swedish language and culture at preschool, cultural background and experiencing a lack of identification. They became more and more connected to a circumstance (in a prepositional phrase, for instance "parents with immigrant background," or as a possessive noun "parents' expectations"). Meanwhile, in the government's bill from the same period, immigrant parents as a term was not used. However, the bill did mention parents, and made impersonal references to them as home, parental collaboration and parental influence. The curriculum did not make any reference to the parents' immigrant, ethnic or cultural backgrounds; in this document, all parents were equally portrayed as just parents or guardians.

The analysis shows that immigrant parents as social actors were excluded as agents via, for example, nominalization and backgrounding, i.e. they were mentioned in the text, but were inferred in some places, for instance in Example 16, which mentions *children and parents from other cultures* at the beginning of the paragraph but only infers them at the end of it in the statement *It is important to build trusting contact in order to be able to discuss values and expectations about the children's time at preschool in a mutual exchange*.

The construction of the immigrant parent in the policy documents over the periods examined followed a parallel pattern to the construction of the immigrant child, with the exception of the government bill and the curriculum, in which immigrant parents were referred to as just parents, guardians or home. By this, I mean that both immigrant children and immigrant parents as social actors were initially represented in terms of a category/classification, while later they became represented as nouns in prepositional phrases, indicating their otherness as a circumstantial rather than an essential attribute/identity (immigrant children/children with an immigrant background).

However, the words that were associated with immigrant parents and children show that immigrant parents were of less concern than their children to the preschool institutional practice. They were important actors for establishing trust and collaboration and facilitating the work of the practitioners, but were not portrayed as active participants in the process of solving the problem of the immigrant child's linguistic and social disabilities, as expressed in the 1970s, or the problem of social segregation, as expressed in the 1990s.

The State Preschool Political Discourse and Immigrants

Gruber and Puskás (2013) describe the focus on cultural diversity and preschool as a meeting place as representing a shift in the politics of integration in Sweden. The politics needed to shift in order to present a reciprocal relationship of active engagement from both the host society and the immigrants. The migration politics set up goals supporting anti-racism and working against discrimination. The argument for using the new concept of diversity was that it included aspects such as class, gender, age and ethnicity. Hence, diversity was supposed to be less exclusionary and less discriminatory than the terms used previously (Gruber & Puskás, 2013, pp. 33, 35). My analysis confirms Gruber and Puskás's analysis. In addition, I show that these ideas were related to multiculturalism and the continuing idea that preschool should meet the needs of children in the context of increased internationalization.

In parallel with the use of images of preschool as a meeting place for cultural diversity, and where cultural differences could be bridged by practitioners, children and the institution itself, terms like "immigrant children," "immigrant parents" and "immigrant families" were replaced and gradually abandoned. Instead, terms like being "of another background," belonging to a "different culture" or speaking a "mother tongue" were used. More recently, having a "foreign background" or being foreign have become markers for immigration. In addition, the idea of *not singling out* difference with such concepts has also been used.

As the state preschool political discourse established immigrants as different from the majority population and the host society, a trend to include immigrants into the host society was established in later policy documents.

I argue that such inclusion could be a reification of the images produced between the 1970s and 1990s of immigrants as an asset to preschool. During that time, immigrants were highlighted as different, and there was an appreciation of differences as something positive. Especially in the 1997 government bill, such an idea was presented as an explanation for how the potential problem of immigrants in preschool could be handled. However, this was downplayed in the bill, and after that it was hardly visible at all. It could be that this appreciative perception was translated into the inclusive and universal address of preschool being *for all*. Hence, all parents shared a similar status and were in a reciprocal relationship of agency and active engagement, as suggested by Gruber and Puskás (2013).

Such an interpretation could also be questioned. During the fifty-year political discourse, images of immigrants as a problem and with a specific need for help and support have been put forward. Already in the early 1970s, immigrant children and parents were singled out as a group with a special need for help and support from society, and particularly from preschool. Preschool was presented as the helper and problem solver, i.e. as the active partner, while immigrants were mainly presented as passive receivers of help. Age has also

been an important factor here. Throughout the period, immigrant children have been, and still are, highlighted as in need of preschool at an earlier age than Swedish children. In the most recent government commission's report (SOU 2020:67), this was stated once again.

Preschool *for all* meant Swedish children from the age of five and newly arrived children and children with another mother tongue from the age of three. It was recognized, for the first time, that making preschool *for all* such children mandatory would be an act of discrimination. This meant that the mission given by the government to the commissioner, to investigate how language preschools for newly arrived children and children with a foreign background should become mandatory from the age of three, was actually a proposal about the state actively discriminating in favor of specific groups of people. The commissioner suggested that, instead of making preschool mandatory for these children, it should be mandatory for the municipalities to offer preschool for children in need of improved language development via "direct enrollment" (SOU 2020:67).¹⁶² The argument is that such a measure would not be discriminatory. However, preschool *for all* five-year-olds should also become mandatory, according to the commissioner's proposal. Hence, the inclusive address, about children with special needs, indirectly reifies notions of immigrants as being different and with specific needs different from those of *all* five-year-olds.

In conclusion, social actor representation and agency in the state preschool political discourse is apparent when it comes to the ways in which immigrant children have been constructed. Their agency was made visible via their participation in the process as both subjects and objects (presented as active or passive); they were also classified as a category. The representation of immigrant parents as social actors, via verbs, is practically undetectable. They were often excluded through backgrounding, nominalization and/or impersonal representation, rendering their agency less tangible than that of the children.

¹⁶² Sw. "direktinskrivning." The name of the bill was: *Preschool for all children—for better language development in Swedish* (Sw. "Förskola för alla barn – för bättre språkutveckling i svenska").

Chapter 8: Findings and Concluding Discussion

In this study, I have shown how new arrival immigrant families perceive Swedish preschool, and have also presented the images of the immigrant child/parent that have been constructed in the state preschool political discourse over the last fifty years. Both sets of data contain common themes, which is indicative of a dialectical relationship between the parents' writings and the state preschool political discourse. This finding is central because it makes clear that, to some extent, the state political discourse and new arrival immigrant families have to deal with similar challenges and dilemmas.

The importance of Swedish language learning was articulated in both sets of data, but somewhat differently. According to the parents' writings, learning Swedish allowed both parents and children to activate their agency in relation to preschool. In the state preschool political discourse, learning Swedish became a way to nurture immigrant children based on their differences and to control the outcome of their education. This discourse also asserted what was expected of practitioners, as well as of immigrant families.

Mother tongue teaching occupied an important place in the state preschool political discourse, while in the parents' writings this was not made an issue in relation to preschool. The parents wrote about their mother tongue, and their own role in transferring this knowledge to their children.

Both sets of data construct language as a tool for integration, although again somewhat differently. In the parents' writings, their own efforts and role in language learning was a theme, creating notions of themselves as agentive in relation to their children's integration. In the state preschool political discourse, the responsibility for integration was placed on the practitioners alone, and they were constructed as the active agents for integration.

Hence, one of the main findings of this study is the parents' emphasis on the importance of learning the Swedish language for their children's development and social engagement with others. Some parents linked developing language skills to successful integration, while others saw it as a direct cause of their children's wellbeing and positive development. Language learning was also portrayed as a process that was initially accompanied by difficulties, during which the child might suffer from loneliness and isolation. With time, the learning process allowed the child to be included in the wider community of children, by using the Swedish language to acquire new friends and to play.

The state preschool political discourse stressed the importance of play for second-language acquisition and stated that learning could occur at a child-to-child level, hence making children a resource for each other. While play was constructed as important, other daily activities were seldom mentioned in the political discourse, whereas in the parents' texts activities and practices such as eating and dressing were underlined as essential for their children to develop self-confidence.

The analysis also shows that the parents' writings could be understood as a way for parents and their children to create notions of belonging to the host society. They used references to emotions and their own language use to create notions of their own belonging and non-belonging. The parents did not write explicitly about the culture they had left behind; instead, they were concerned with their immediate situation. In the preschool political discourse, belonging was more categorical, i.e. immigrant parents and children were categorized according to their needs and cultural backgrounds, and mainly without reference to agency.

After this brief summary of the main results, I now proceed with a discussion of how the findings can be interpreted in relation to previous research about early childhood education and care, and additional research on immigration not mentioned in chapter two. I highlight conflicting perspectives and dilemmas that are pertinent to the findings as well as in research, with a special focus on the parents' and preschool's agency in relation to language learning and belonging.

The Parents' Agency Constructed via Language Learning

The parents' agency was activated linguistically through their use of language, for instance, verbs. Most of the verbs they used carried a meaning of agency often attributed to the subject/agent. Verbs, as explained the section on theory and methodology, are linguistic devices used to express actions and agency. They show the relationships between an agent and the processes enacted to reach a goal. Pronouns are also important indicators of agency, and they connect language to contexts. *I* and *we*, for example, can be used by the same person as a way to shift positions and embody an individual and/or collective identity. First-person pronouns, such as *me* and *I*, immediately center the attention on the self. In addition, pronominal alterations can be used to navigate through multiple identities and positions in interactional contexts.

In my data, "I" was used when the informant was either writing about past experiences, or was becoming an agent and contributing to the development of the children (like Imad), or when writing about feelings. "We," on the other hand, was used to emphasize values, morals and ways of bringing up children, or comparing their present life with past experiences in their homeland. "We"

was used to highlight a collective experience of being. De Fina (2003) explains that pronoun switching to “we” occurred in her study, suddenly and without the participants being concerned about introducing the referents of the “we.” This is similar to how my informants proceeded in their writings; they switched back and forth from “I” to “we” without explaining who was who. Furthermore, the switch to “we” was used by my informants as a marker of collective agency and belonging to a group with whom they shared the experience about which they were writing.

When describing what went on at home, the parents tended to use the pronoun “I” in relation to their interactions with their children. This individual agency of the parents indicates the occurrence of several situations at home, such as a confrontation with the child, a demonstration of parental authority, a reflection upon what the child was going through at preschool, a reflection upon how the Swedes think as a means to understand certain behaviors, and an expression of wishes and desires. When describing their interactions with preschool, individual agency was often transformed into collective agency, expressed in the use of the pronoun “we.” What the pronoun “we” included is unclear; for example, whether it referred to both parents, or the parents and the child. This ambiguous collective agency created a framework of us and them which signaled, through their writings, a desire to be agentive, to participate, resist, accept, oppose, compromise, agree and disagree. These positions were also marked by change over time, which the parents described by using time adverbs.

The parents’ way of presenting their own agency was not about teaching their children the Swedish language, but about finding ways to facilitate its happening. However, according to the parents themselves, their agency, in situations of conflict with the preschool, was not welcomed or encouraged, as when they tried to express their opinions and points of view about their children’s language learning or failure to learn.¹⁶³ This is confirmed by Rissanen (2022), who found that immigrant parents experienced their meetings with teachers in the Swedish educational system as only a polite encounter that had no real impact on their children’s school culture. In this study, the parents used their writings to voice how their contributions on the matter of language learning were disregarded by practitioners, as in the example of the mother who wished her child to play with native speakers and the mother who argued that her child did not suffer from a speech impediment because she talked at home. In my interpretation of how the parents chose to describe their own agency and absence of agency, they used references to how arguments and experiences from home were not valued in preschool, where a medical discourse and a discourse about the child’s best interests took precedence over the parents’

¹⁶³ This displays a contradiction with what was recommended by the earlier curriculum about cooperation between the home and preschool, and now recommended by the new 2018 curriculum, in which parents are invited to evaluate their children’s education.

own observations and perceptions. Eek-Karlsson and Emilson (2021) showed in their study how preschool practitioners acknowledged the importance of teaching Swedish to immigrant children in order to allow them to be included in society, while at the same time underlining the importance of allowing them to speak their mother tongue as a way to promote belonging. Immigrant children were perceived by practitioners as preferring to play with children who spoke the same language (Eek-Karlsson & Emilson, 2021). Belonging, in this case, can be understood in broader terms, where both languages of immigrant children become essential for developing their sense of belonging.

In contrast to the parents' views and requests regarding language learning, their preferences and demands with regard to specific foods were respected. This could be interpreted as meaning that the preschool acknowledged diversity when it was defined in terms of difference; i.e. the families' cultural and religious identity, but held an expert attitude towards the parents when it came to their role in their children's language development and learning. The exclusivity of preschool's expertise over matters related to language learning was entrenched in the state political discourse about preschool as holding the best, and preferred, knowledge with regard to what was best for the child, and being in charge of it accordingly.

In their writings, the parents constructed a difference between understanding a language and actually speaking it. They situated their children in the listener's position at the beginning of their texts and showed how, with time, their children became speakers of the language. This lexical construction of the children and their agency with regard to language learning follows a certain order (understand first, then speak) that was also communicated in the state preschool political discourse, i.e. the child learns to understand and speak, not to speak and understand.

In the parents' writings, they presented their children's endeavor to learn the Swedish language as not only affecting the children, but as also making themselves active contributors in the fulfillment of this aim. The image produced was that the parents initially provided the comfort and safe surroundings their children needed to feel safe at preschool. The parents invested their time by being physically present at the preschool together with their children, until the children became accustomed to this new milieu. Parents also highlighted their own interest in their children's development, especially their linguistic development, by describing how they observed and reflected upon this issue. Hence, the parents acknowledged the importance of their own role in encouraging their children to learn the new language, but at the same time they did not write about how they themselves were developing and learning it. They used their writing to be critical towards Swedes, whom they described as impossible to make contact with, and this was presented as an obstacle for their own learning of the new language. Preschool practitioners are sometimes the only Swedish people that immigrant families get to know, especially in ethnically segregated neighborhoods, and in these cases it is the practitioners'

experience that they bear the responsibility for promoting the parents' belonging as well, by somehow supporting their language development (Eek-Karlsson & Emilson, 2021).

Parents voiced anxieties concerning their children's potential to become skilled in the new language. If the children became skilled in Swedish, they would become self-confident and more independent in their relationship with their parents. Hence, learning the new language was also portrayed as a process of transformation that empowered the child rather than the adult. Such a potentially critical situation was expressed in the state discourse of the 1970s as "a special risk situation," particularly for the child. The child could be trying to adapt to contradictory values, the ones played out in the home and the ones learned in preschool. It was described as the practitioners' responsibility to avoid this, due to concern for the immigrant child.

Why was learning the Swedish language constructed as important for both parents and children in their meeting with preschool? The parents' writings were partly echoing what the preschool state political discourse described as the benefits of learning Swedish and the way in which it facilitates integration into the host society. I also argue, from the findings of my study, that the parents used language learning as an arena to demonstrate how they activated their own agency as well as that of their children, even though Swedish was not a language they themselves knew. Their active agency was constituted by their awareness of being the other who had to learn the language in order to meet the expectations of the host society about integration. Their agency was also activated when they showed resistance to behaviors that were accepted by the preschool but which they condemned as unsuitable or improper, such as the child playing with soil and dirtying his/her clothes, or playing outdoors. It is confirmed by Eek-Karlsson and Emilson (2021) that outdoor activities are one of the reasons for clashes occurring between preschool practitioners and immigrant parents' beliefs. This contestation directly influences the child's sense of belonging, because outdoor activities in nature, regardless of the weather, are a key characteristic of Swedish preschool and, as discussed below, outdoors activities can be considered a nation-reproducing performance (Millei, 2020).

Agency was also created by the parents in relation to the issue of learning the mother tongue. In the state preschool political discourse, preschool's role in securing immigrant children's mother tongue has been emphasized throughout the period investigated here. However, the parents did not present their children's mother tongue as a language that needed to be developed in preschool. Learning Swedish was considered important because it was related to their children's wellbeing and their ability to integrate and make friends in the new environment of preschool. The parents did not construct preschool as an agent that was expected to acquire and develop their children's mother tongue skills. Rather, home was described as the place where they themselves would be able to teach their children their own language and culture.

On the other hand, state preschool political discourse emphasized the role of preschool as a place that helped the immigrant child to develop his/her identity and become more knowledgeable about his/her cultural background. In the 1970s, it was explained that the mother tongue is important for stimulating the child's linguistic ability because the home environment may be linguistically poor. Mother tongue teaching by the preschool was recommended as a measure to prevent the child from developing two half languages. In addition, it was seen as relevant for acquiring new language skills. From the 1990s onwards, "mother tongue" was used in the policy documents as an adjective to describe immigrant children as: "children with another mother tongue than Swedish," and mother tongue teaching was recommended for the development of this language. The state preschool political discourse changed from its initial emphasis on the need of some children to learn their mother tongue into the later description of a general need for all children who have another mother tongue than Swedish. However, mother tongue learning in educational institutions is still not mandatory.

This study shows that the parents who wrote about helping their children to learn Arabic demonstrated both agency and competence in relation to this endeavor. In their writings, some of the parents displayed their disagreement with the stated benefits of mother tongue language teaching in preschool. One parent viewed her child's use of the Arabic language while playing with Arab children as a "problem," which led to zero development in her child's learning of the Swedish language. Other parents complained about the lack of contact with native speakers, which would have been a way to enhance their Swedish language skills. In the 1990s, the state preschool political discourse picked up on another dimension of the problems related to immigration, i.e. segregation and how it could lead to miscommunication and mistrust. Preschool was again portrayed as a solution to this problem.

These differences between what the home and the preschool were capable of providing for children in terms of language skills and knowledge could have several interpretations. The parents could regard their children's mother tongue as being naturally developed at home, and therefore it was a concern for the home alone, which could be an explanation for why they omitted including it in their writings about preschool. They focused instead on the Swedish language, which anchored them in the present and the future, while the mother tongue is more likely to link them to their past. The concept of mother tongue, or *langue d'origine*, as it is sometimes called in French, is problematic, according to Faneca, Araujó E Sá and Melo-Pfeifer (2015), because of its ambiguity. It evokes the origins, the social context or the homeland of the parents and their migratory history, which is not necessarily part of the child's own experience. In the context of immigrants, the mother tongue is automatically categorized as a minority language, with negative connotations (Weber & Horner, 2012). Mother tongue education is problematic, according to Weber and Horner (2012); mother-tongue variations make it difficult to give each

individual child a suitable mother tongue education, and mother-tongue ideology reflects an arrogant attitude on the part of the experts, who are telling minority parents what is good for their children.

Another explanation could be that the parents considered preschool to be a representative of the host society and its culture. This view is in line with the state preschool political discourse of the 1970s, in which preschool was seen as a place that gradually transferred and channeled the child into the host society's culture and prepared him/her linguistically to enter the school system and enjoy equal rights with his/her native peers.

Another explanation for why preschool should provide the immigrant child with mother tongue teaching could be that it is trying to reduce the value-related conflicts that arise due to the child's dual adaptation, to home and to preschool; a fear that was expressed during the 1970s. Teaching the mother tongue at preschool becomes a way of bringing the home into the preschool and thus bridging the cultural gap that exists between the two places. One could also argue that it is a way for the preschool as a state institution to supervise and control what these children are taught in their mother tongue.

Even though learning and speaking one's mother tongue is an important human right and should be protected (Skutnabb-Kangas & Philipson, 1989), some linguists (Leung, Harris & Rampton, 1997) advocate the use of alternative concepts, such as language expertise (proficiency), language affiliation (identification) and language inheritance (origin, tradition). Such alternative wordings would focus more on children's skills, rather than essentializing their identity. The concept of a mother tongue is problematic, as already mentioned, due to its ambiguity. In the state preschool political discourse, the wording of the *immigrant child* transformed into *a child with a different cultural background*, *a child with an immigrant background* and, finally, into *a child with another mother tongue than Swedish*. This transformation took place partly in parallel with the implementation of a preschool curriculum. However, that curriculum never adopted the wording of the *immigrant child*. Instead, it addressed such children as *a child with another mother tongue than Swedish* as though this wording was more inclusive than the *immigrant child*. However, and according to Sayad (2014), identifying immigrant children with their mother tongue is a way of marking their belonging to another place. Identifying children with their mother tongue is just another way of identifying the child with his/her parents' place of origin and a way of constructing such children as different from the children of the host society.

Preschool's Agency and Language Ideologies

The prevalence of language learning as a theme in the parents' writings, as well as in the state preschool political discourse, highlights the importance of language for the construction of identity. It is important to notice that the themes produced different notions attached to language learning. The parents

never constructed learning their mother tongue or learning Swedish as a special need that must be met, as was done in the state preschool political discourse. Instead, the parents wrote about learning language in terms of development and improvement. While this was also part of the state discourse, it was mainly in relation to Swedish children's language learning. This reflects the state preschool political discourse's view of the self and the other, as well as the parents' view of the self and the other. As mentioned, the parents positioned themselves as agentive in relation to language learning, and this was also true of the state discourse, where preschool and the government were constructed as agentive actors. Below, I reflect on how and why the state preschool discourse enacted the agentive preschool.

Language plays a central role in nation-building processes, and language is entangled with the power dynamics invested by majority societies to maintain and sustain preferred cultural norms, according to Blanchet and Conan (2015). These authors assert that educational systems have been one of the most effective tools for implementing linguistic politics, founded on the idea of assimilation to an identity known as national. Preschools are described as "key sites" for teaching national identity and belonging via education, where language learning is important (Blanchet & Conan, 2015; Åkerblom & Harju, 2019). Language is charged with ideology and systems of ideas, as pointed out in CDA and by others (De Fina, 2003; Fairclough, 1992, 2003; Irvine, 1989). Hence, to learn both the Swedish language and one's mother tongue is also to learn about culture, norms and ideologies.

There exist several language ideologies; among others: the mother tongue ideology, the standard language ideology, the hierarchy of languages, the one nation/one language ideology, the ideology of purism, etc. (Weber & Horner, 2012). The meaning of language ideologies is multidimensional; for example, they represent language in a way that enhances the interests of a certain social category/group and mediates between social functions and structures and different forms of talking/writing (Kroskrity, 2006). The standard language ideology regards languages as homogenous, well-defined and bounded entities. Socio-political developments play a fundamental role in the standardization process, which is more fully achieved in the written form (orthography, grammar) than in the spoken language, and strengthened in textbooks and teaching practices. The one nation/one language ideology is essentialist in nature because it binds language to a geographical territory and links it to national identity. Mother tongue ideology presupposes that people can only have one "mother tongue," which in many cases is not the case (Weber & Horner, 2012).

Deumert (2000) questions the concept of a mother tongue and what it actually means, whether it is the first language one learns, the language one speaks best, the language one identifies with or the language one inherits due to origins. Mother tongue ideology divides people forcibly into native speaker

and non-native speaker categories, with the latter seen as by default incompetent and lacking sufficient linguistic skills. In the context of Swedish preschool, Puskás (2013) suggests that the preschool curriculum contains such discrepancies and produces dilemmas for practitioners. In the curriculum, the image of preschool is that of a monolingual Swedish institution, while at the same time practitioners are asked to work on developing the children's multilingualism. The Swedish language has a higher status among preschool practitioners, teachers, children and parents, in spite of the importance of the mother tongue stipulated in the curriculum. This is also confirmed by Sopenan (2019), who found that practitioners' reflexivity about language awareness comes more spontaneously in relation to Swedish/Finnish than to other languages.

In addition, the state preschool political discourse, especially in recent decades, has focused on the risks and deficiencies connected to the immigrant child, which are used to suggest various measures of support to meet the immigrant child's special needs. This finding is in line with Harju and Åkerblom's (2020) argument in their study; that even though multicultural and multilingual approaches are promoted in the national curriculum for preschool, the daily linguistic practices in Swedish preschool reflect a different reality in which monolingualism and monoculturalism prevail as the norm. These incongruent aims make it difficult for practitioners to deal with children with an immigrant background, and this in turn has produced a dominant deficit discourse. The deficit discourse, according to Harju and Åkerblom (2020), has led to the use of controlled pedagogy to compensate for the lack of Swedish language competence in the "other" child, whereas the Swedish preschool child receives a different kind of pedagogy founded on the idea of freedom and agency (Åkerblom & Harju, 2019).

Linda Palla (2021) points out that: "Children's needs are a recurring theme in the Swedish preschool curriculum" and that "such discourse is well established at the official and regulatory level" (p. 380). Pallas singles out the way in which:

the needs of certain children are seen in relation to something that can be interpreted as special education. That certain children are constructed as more needy points towards normative comparisons and differentiations of children (Foucault, 1975/2009, 2000); that is, children are divided (Foucault, 1975/2009) into those who need more and those who do not. (Palla, 2021, p. 381)

This differentiation subsequently leads to the creation of a normative model, which in the case of my study is the Swedish preschool child. Thus, the idea that the immigrant child needs to be helped in order to be able to function on the same terms as Swedes, which was expressed in an earlier commissioners' report, has been perpetuated in the state preschool political discourse. This confirms that practitioners may be more concerned with getting the children

accustomed to structure and routines than to “engaging in meaningful interactions with teacher and with peers” (Peleman et al., 2020, p. 37).

In this present study, the Swedish child becomes the term of reference, or the ideal, which the immigrant child should emulate. This confirms the findings of Åkerblom and Harju (2019), that the education or pedagogy the immigrant child receives in preschool is designed to compensate for the elements he/she is missing and which exist in the Swedish preschool child, such as Swedish language competence.

Palla (2021) writes about how differentiations were constructed in the curriculum between the general needs of all children and the special needs of individual or certain children. She highlights the importance of this official and politicized discourse in relation to how practitioners might interpret their mission, and especially in relation to equality and processes of normalization and deviation, since it makes clear: “how difficult it can be to relate to overlapping and sometimes contradictory governing formulations concerning ‘all children,’ ‘each child,’ and, in particular, ‘children in need of special support’” (p. 389). She asks: which children were, or can be, included in “an umbrella of difference”? (p. 382).

Nic Craith (2012) explains that adopting the new language is the migrant’s way of finding acceptance and recognition from local people, but this effort to belong can also be counter-productive because it emphasizes the fact that the immigrant is different. The parents, through their writings, showed an explicit awareness of these differences between languages, which could explain why they criticized the practitioners about their children not playing with native children and they themselves not having any real interaction with native Swedes. As in the state discourse, the parents constructed practitioners and preschool as the agents who should teach their children Swedish. This awareness could also be an explanation for why they did not expect preschool to teach their children Arabic. The parents’ eagerness to make their children acquire Swedish language skills can be seen as a way to show willingness to learn from and about the host society. It could also be interpreted as meaning that the parents knew about the discourse on the role of learning the host society’s language. If so, such a discourse might be defined as a “global” discourse, “located everywhere and nowhere” (Fairclough, 2003 p. 152).

The emphasis put on mother tongue teaching by the state preschool political discourse also reflects the increasing importance of preschool in society and could be regarded as an argument to attract immigrant parents and urge them to enroll their children in preschool. Preschool is depicted as knowing what is best for the child, and that it is capable of taking over the home’s task of teaching the child his/her own mother tongue. This is in line with the tradition in Swedish society not to necessarily trust parents’ abilities to nurture their own children, as I exemplified in the introduction.

Belonging

The concept of belonging includes a notion of attachment, whether referring to a person, a thing or a place. Anthias (2018) argues that it is important to recognize the various shapes of belonging, which are: belonging as a formal membership (as in nationality, for example), belonging as informal membership (which is about participation and being accepted by others), belonging as in political attributions (being a Jew or black), and belonging as being attached to (shared values or feelings or origins). Belonging is always in some way “located” because it occurs in relation to something that is geographically and socially outside of the self.

Yuval-Davis (2011) encourages us to distinguish between belonging and the politics of belonging: whereas belonging is about emotional attachment and feeling “at home,” accompanied by both positive and negative emotions, the politics of belonging refers to political projects aimed at creating “belonging” in/for a given group. Belonging is an analytical tool that allows us to ask: “to what” and “with whom” does a person belong? (Anthias, 2018). According to Anthias (2018), it has a “linguistic force” that is not inherent in the concept of identity. This force links belonging to a physical and symbolic place, taking into consideration both the space and time aspects. Belonging has an emotional aspect that influences our perceptions and experiences of the material space we are in, especially if we decide to agree with Ahmed (2014), that our emotions are defined by existing social structures (the micropolitics of our daily lives). Belonging can thus be studied and addressed “in terms of experience” (Anthias, 2018).

When searching for the word “belonging” in relation to the immigrant child and family in the state preschool political discourse, I found that they were constructed as belonging to that group in need of special help and support from society. The immigrant child was also described as having a dual cultural belonging and multicultural affiliation. In the political discourse, belonging was determined from the perspective of the writers, of what they thought the child needed. Furthermore, the belonging of the immigrant child was highlighted solely in relation to culture, but at the same time culture was also explained in this discourse as a vast concept that could encompass everything. In the state preschool political discourse, explicit belonging was about what made the immigrant child different from other children. There were attempts, however, to understand the perceptions of the immigrant child/parent with regard to the host society. In the documents I examined, references to Sweden as the new country and Swedish children as the children of the new country were detected. It was not the immigrant who was constructed as new, but rather the host country was portrayed as new to the immigrant child/parent.

This shift in perspective was affirmative of the demands placed on practitioners to apply culturally aware work at preschool. This was described as requiring empathy, increased knowledge of the array of cultures existing in

Sweden and questioning one's own beliefs and value system. There was a requirement to maintain an open attitude towards the immigrant child/parent in order to facilitate his/her belonging. In this discourse, preschool was constructed as representative of Swedish society and culture and as the immigrant's first deep encounter with Sweden. Describing Sweden as the new country reflected a progressive approach when compared to today's use of the term new arrival children/parents/families. However, it is important to note that the term new arrival was adopted in order to identify people who had themselves immigrated, and not their descendants. The "new" in the term new arrival indicates the short amount of time that has passed since the immigrants' arrival in the host country.

The Parents' Agency: Belonging and Non-belonging

While the adjectives new and old were used to describe countries and cultures in the state preschool political discourse, and implicitly to draw the limits of what/who belongs where, belonging in the parents' writings was formulated differently. The parents used place adverbs and pronouns to demonstrate the parts and places to which they saw themselves as belonging. Their belonging was not just cultural, as depicted in the state preschool political discourse, where culture was used as an umbrella term for language, values, religion and so on. The parents were more specific in outlining their bodily, ethical and moral belonging. They showed through their writings that their children's sense of belonging was perceived differently to theirs. Play was stressed, both by the parents and by the state preschool political discourse, as a key factor in facilitating immigrant children's belonging to the community of children and to preschool. In the children's experience, play became a third space that allowed the child to connect home and school (Yahya & Wood, 2017). The parents' writings on preschool affirmed the importance of child-to-child relationships, which was highlighted in the preschool policy texts.

A certain resistance to belonging was also detectable in some of the parents' writings. It was expressed through feelings of fear and mistrust of the authorities and preschool practitioners. The example of Hiba, who felt constrained by the controls of her Swedish neighbors, preschool practitioners, doctors and the law in general was an example of non-belonging. Research shows that belonging is embodied and that social displacement and replacement have effects on people's physical and psychological health (Mattes and Lang, 2020). In the case of illegal immigrants, Bendixen (2020, p. 479) writes about existential displacement, where non-belonging is the result of "a violent mode of governmentality that includes laws, health care structures, and migration management rationalities."

During earlier periods, however, the state preschool political discourse adopted an empathic view vis à vis the immigrant parents' situation and made a genuine attempt to understand it by emphasizing cultural differences and the

changes that immigrant families had to go through in their host society. There was a desire to enable these families to function on the same terms as Swedes and, in addition to Swedish language acquisition, mother tongue teaching was seen as important, both emotionally and socially. Empathy and understanding were prescribed as necessary tools for executing culturally aware work in preschool institutional practice. As demonstrated by Ohrlander (1992), empathy and mercy were already crucial elements at the beginning of the 1900s for taking charge of vulnerable working-class children in Swedish society.

Throughout the history of preschool in Sweden, involving parents has always been expressed as a concern and practitioners have been encouraged to deal with it through collaborating with the home. From the beginning, it was a strategy to encourage the parents, mainly mothers, to use the services offered by this form of institutional daycare. It was also a way of instilling bourgeois norms in the working class. In addition to the children, preschool's norms and values about hygiene, play and education were also directed towards the parents. Today, when attending preschool has become a significant part of living a normal childhood, parents are still important, but in somewhat different ways (Lindgren, 2020; Lindgren & Söderlind, 2019). In spite of their importance for facilitating the practitioners' work with children, the discursive practices of the state include parents and their contribution without being explicit about their active participation in the process. The present study shows, for example, that parents suffer from backgrounding (more on this subject below). They are, as Ohrlander (1992) describes it, agents of the state who are instructed to comply with what is expected of them without having their own power of action. This could possibly explain the omission of the use of active verbs in relation to parents in the state preschool political discourse, thus depriving them of the opportunity to become social actors.

The examples analyzed in this study about parents resisting belonging, through showing mistrust, anxiety and condemnation of certain practices (e.g. describing the questioning by preschool practitioners, or fear of their neighbors and doctors), are part of what Fortier (2012) calls the imaginary of the migrant. She describes it as one of the many social attitudes based on assumption and action, and that it shapes our understanding of national borders, cultures, and relationships to each other.

The imaginary of the migrant is shaped by a complex relationship of desires and anxieties. This ambivalence of desires and anxieties is found in the parents' writings; for example, at one moment they are worried about their children not needing or obeying them, but the next moment they write proudly about their children gaining self-confidence and independence. This also indicates the way in which children proceeded when developing their sense of belonging.

According to Nic Craith (2012), migrant children attempt to copy the host society, a practice which, as shown by my informants, causes both tension and confusion at home, where the parents adhere to the way things were done in

their society of origin. The immigrant child's mimicry of other children in preschool, as exemplified by Lina's daughter Helen, is a way of showing her independence and ability to detach herself from the rules existing at home and to fully belong to the preschool. Bodily gestures, Nic Craith (2012) argues, strengthen the markers of difference between migrants and natives, and children have a strong awareness of the attributes that make them seem different. By mimicking the bodily gestures of other children, Helen's belonging to the host community continued even after she left preschool.

After examining the state preschool political discourse in this study, I argue that it also contained an imaginary about the immigrant, similarly founded on assumption and action. In the 1970s, preschool practitioners were already being encouraged to have conversations with parents as a way to understand how they perceived the preschool's program and whether they found its content to be questionable or not. This means that there has been a need to discover immigrant parents' perceptions since the 1970s, and that assumptions have partly been steering the preschool's work with immigrant children and families. This imaginary about the immigrant is also shown in existing desires and anxieties: the desire to develop a multicultural approach to working in the preschool, while at the same time experiencing anxiety about failing to equip the immigrant child with the necessary tools to succeed in the host society.

Empathy Translated into a Culturally Aware Approach in Preschool Practices

In contrast to the claims of earlier research (Gruber & Puskás 2013), that the responsibility for fixing the problem falls on immigrants rather than preschool and the politics guiding it, in the 1970s and 1990s, the Swedish state preschool political discourse underlined the importance of practitioners being aware of cultural diversity in order to provide immigrant families and their children with a positive preschool experience. Practitioners' failure to provide this could damage the preschool's institutional practice; thus, they were held accountable for the work they performed at preschool. This could be explained by the way in which the preschool curriculum is formulated. As mentioned earlier, the Swedish curriculum for preschool lacks any guidelines or instructions as to how practitioners should proceed in implementing the values and principles it contains. Piškur et al. (2021) argue that the Swedish curriculum is founded on the German-Nordic didaktik tradition, which empowers practitioners by encouraging them to define and design their own appropriate methods for concretizing the goals articulated in the curriculum. Therefore, they, and not the parents, bear the responsibility for providing children with a positive experience of being at preschool.

Already in the 1970s, preschool practitioners were being asked to implement this kind of work and to demonstrate cultural understanding and a reflexive attitude towards immigrant families' culture and situation. In many places in the examined policy documents, the discursive practice of the state revealed flexibility and allowed for other points of view to be included in its construction of the ideal preschool. For example, it took into account the possible perspectives of immigrant families, describing Sweden as the new country and Swedish children as children of the new country. Löthman and Puskás (2021), in their study, presented this cultural awareness and self-reflexivity as a discovery for the practitioners' work with immigrant families, and credited their research project for the incorporation of new arrival families' perspectives into the preschool practices.

I want to do justice to my data and argue that my study actually shows that the state preschool political discourse has emphasized the importance of adopting both a culturally aware approach and the immigrants' perspective since as early as the 1970s. An explanation for why Löthman and Puskás (2021) attribute this finding to their project could be due to the fact that, in later policy documents, this earlier explicit expression of empathy towards immigrant families faded away and cultural differences between Swedish and immigrant children were erased. This could mean that increased cultural diversity in Swedish society made the culturally aware work appear to be a self-evident way of working in a multicultural society. Still, Berge and Johansson (2021) found in their study that the practitioners' focus was unilaterally on differences when reflecting upon children's belonging. Meanwhile, in the discursive practice of the state, light was also shed on the importance of acknowledging both different and similar traits that the host society shared with immigrant families. Unilaterally focusing on one or the other was discouraged. These findings make it urgent to address the question of preschool's failure to adopt a culturally aware approach, in spite of its clear discursive formulations.

Lunneblad (2013) argues that, since the early 1970s, preschool has been part of Sweden's integration politics, with specific multicultural goals of preserving immigrants' cultures. Whether the culturally aware work prescribed in earlier policy documents can be understood as a specific multicultural goal of preserving immigrant families' culture is indeed, I argue, a question of interpretation.

Beyond Cultural Differences and Language Differences?

In the state's discursive practice, cultural differences gradually became referred to as language differences alone, as the preschool curriculum clearly shows. Runfors (2013) describes this shift in focus from cultural differences and challenges—found in earlier policy documents, commissioners' reports and governmental bills—to language-related differences and challenges—

found in later documents—as linguistic challenges. This was a reformulation related to the multi-ethnic composition of parents and children. For example, in the 1990s, immigrants’ residential segregation was constructed in the state discursive practice as a cause of linguistic challenges and miscommunication among the different groups in society. This construction allowed the preschool to occupy a front-line position in combatting the misunderstandings and creation of stereotypes caused by residential segregation, while at the same time the behavior was considered natural due to immigrants’ preference to live near each other. This discursive construction made it appear as though all the problems caused by and related to immigration could be solved by the institution of preschool. The reformation of a school system founded on the idea of giving all citizens access to general and basic education also meant transferring societal problems and social responsibility into education, by which means the processes of educationalization are created (Hutt, 2017; Smeyers & Depaepe, 2008; Tröhler, 2017).

De Fina (2003) evokes the fact the public discourses on immigration, for instance, or discourses circulating in related domains such as jobs and housing, influence how the immigrant constructs and negotiates identities due to the power expressions and relationships that are embodied in the various practices that diffuse and strengthen discourse. Immigrants become very apprehensive about existing public discourses. They are aware that discourses have an impact on the opinions of others which may lead, through politics, to measures being taken either against or for their interests. The informants in this study described how their residential conditions had had a direct impact on their children’s linguistic development, showing an awareness of how segregation affects integration. When the failure of children is attributed to their laziness and linguistic inefficiency, this explains why unemployment and living on social welfare constituted the social landscape of the segregation discourse, as painted by the state preschool political discourse.

The discourse of language learning, according to Weber and Horner (2012), is related to the discourse of integration, and “integration” as a term has become so widely and generally used that we must attempt to look behind it to detect the discriminatory forms of behavior that it encompasses. In the discourse of integration, migrant children and adults become “the others,” or rather “the problematic others,” who need to be shown and taught “better” ways to succeed in life. The way in which the state preschool political discourse has constructed immigrant children as children in need, with an emphasis on their immigration experience alone, damages our understanding of the immigration phenomenon, according to Bourdieu, and as quoted in the introduction of this thesis, leads to limiting “the study of migrants into an artificial problematic of ‘lack’ and deficiency explained away by ritualized reference, now to their lower class composition and substandard conditions of living, now to the peculiarities of the culture they have brought with them” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2000, p. 174). A challenging question for policymakers is to determine how

the discursive practices of the state can bypass the focus on lack attributed to culture and ethnicity. Dahinden (2012) finds it problematic that the integration discourse and policies tend to position ethnicity (language and culture included) center stage at the expense of other forms of identification that are non-ethnic.

Preschool as an Ideological Dilemma

According to state preschool political discourse, because preschool is a social and cultural meeting place, it is supposed to help children develop a multicultural sense of belonging, through working on diversity and the values attached to it. At the same time, preschool is described in the state discursive practice as the leading representative of Swedish culture and immigrant families' main point of entry to Swedish society. Runfors (2013) questions the contradiction inherent in this description of preschool, and asks: how can preschool be an institution that is supposed to represent and reproduce the nation and at the same time teach children values that are founded on cultural diversity?

Most of my informants did not introduce into their writing the cultural diversity that, according to the state preschool political discourse, characterizes Swedish society and preschool. In the parents' discursive practice, two groups of children were presented: their children and Swedish children. Only Imad touched upon the subject of diversity at preschool and described his children's experiences of meeting other children with different cultural backgrounds. This could suggest two interpretations of preschool. Firstly, preschool's culturally aware work is very efficient, succeeding in creating a fusion of cultures that is perceived by the parents as Swedish, or, secondly, preschool's culturally aware work is a disaster, melting the children's different cultural backgrounds into a Swedish pot. Haugen (2021) shows that in Norway, discourses on cultural diversity are omitted from teachers' views on diversity. The absence of any outlines of children's cultural differences in the parents' writings allows for further interpretations about how the parents chose to present themselves. Coming from locations where cultural, ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity is the norm, rather than the exception, the parents' differentiation of the children's groups was constructed in terms of outsider/insider. The outsider represented the newcomer, i.e. their own children, while the insider represented all the other children who were in place before them. What is included and excluded in the examined texts also alludes to how childhood is constructed and perceived by the parents and the state, respectively.

The double-edged description of preschool as a representative of monoculturalism while at the same time promoting multiculturalism, could be described as what Michael Billig et al. (1988) call *an ideological dilemma*. According to the preschool curriculum, preschool ought to transfer Swedish cultural heritage to all children. As argued by Reimers (2021), this articulation

reflects a static view of cultural heritage as a strong national and ethnic identity marker. This view can have a detrimental effect on preschool practices, because it marginalizes children with other cultural backgrounds and makes them look strange and different. What Reimers warns about here was illustrated in some parents' writings; for instance, the child who was diagnosed with a speech impediment, and the child who was suspected of being afraid of ghosts. Runfors (2013) argues that this view of cultural heritage causes confusion in practitioners' pedagogical work, while other researchers have shown that practitioners are agents of change regarding the transfer of cultural heritage, and that national traditions are transformed while being enacted and performed (Puskás & Andersson, 2021; Millei 2020).

Some of the data also talks about what is defined by Millei (2020) as everyday nationalism, where daily practices are understood as a way to reproduce the nation and its values. Some of the daily practices that were appreciated by the parents were exactly what she calls embodied practices, i.e. teaching children how to eat and dress by themselves, but also the way in which practitioners gave children's drawings to their parents, and expressed their admiration for the children's way of dressing. These practices were singled out by the parents and appreciated because they were perceived as a way to enhance the child's self-image and confidence.

Belonging can be practiced through helping children to trust their own qualities and strengthening their role to explore new things (Eek-Karlsson & Emilson, 2021). The fact that the parents highlighted these daily practices could be interpreted as meaning that they sensed a new way of belonging that they were not used to in their own country. These daily practices, unexceptional in the preschool environment, were highlighted by the parents as exceptional, probably because they allowed for performing the national Swedish types, as explained by Millei (2020). One can conclude that preschool's daily practices, in addition to language learning, are belonging tools used by both practitioners and immigrant children.

Instead, Reimers (2021) suggests the use of cultural heritagging (*kulturarvandet*) as a substitute term, which is more inclusive of the cultural diversity that exists in Swedish preschools. This contradiction in vision and application only allows the different cultures to be made "visible." As the 1990s policy documents warned, too much emphasis on cultural differences and peculiarities on certain occasions, as shown in chapter seven, carries the risk of exoticizing the other.

Gruber (2008) has shown that such notions of making the children's—or rather, their parents'—diverse cultural backgrounds visible in school produce Swedish nationalist discourses and othering. Practices that emphasize Swedish culture and language have been shown to be given priority in preschool institutional practice, and this could lead practitioners to educate immigrant parents in accordance with the expectations of the host society (see also

Lunneblad, 2013; 2017; Sønsthagen, 2020; Runfors, 2013; Åkerblom & Harju, 2019; Fredriksson & Lindgren Eneflo, 2019).

As suggested earlier, Billig et al. (1988) provide us with the concept of an “ideological dilemma” as an analytical tool to help us understand and make sense of the contradictions and discrepancies that we encounter in everyday life. Promoting monoculturalism and multiculturalism as practices in Swedish preschool creates colliding aspirations that seem impossible to achieve. It creates a problematic contrast between authority and dominance (monoculturalism) on the one hand, and equality and democracy (multiculturalism) on the other. Billig et al. (1988) explain that teaching is in itself an act in which the ideology is represented. The conceptualization of preschool as an ideological dilemma allows two oppositional ideals to be articulated simultaneously, which means that no single narrative can prevail completely. Rather, as Van Dijk (1984) shows, competing narratives can be negotiated because a pluralistic society is always aware of “the other,” and allowing prejudiced views, as long as they are not radicalized, is compatible with the democratic features of tolerance and equality (Van Dijk, 1984). Discursing on preschool thus becomes open to multiple and conflicting narratives that are dialectically engaged with each other, as shown in this study between the parents’ and the state’s discursive practices, as well as within each of them.

If the state discursive practice on preschool is looked at from the point of view of an ideological dilemma, simultaneously promoting monoculturalism and multiculturalism does not appear to create colliding practices or perspectives. Prevailing common sense would argue for the necessity of learning Swedish when living in Sweden. It is also common sense to introduce multicultural practices, such as mother tongue teaching in preschool, because Swedish society is founded on the democratic values of equality and respect for the other’s values, and a child has the right to expressions of cultural and linguistic identity. Preschool as an ideological dilemma is also constructed in the parents’ writing; for example, when Rasha described the pupil–teacher relationship in Sweden in both negative and positive terms (lack of respect/equality), or the mother who praised her child’s independence while at the same time condemning it as detachment and not needing her. These examples are constructed against the background of the social changes my informants experienced.

Börjesson and Palmblad (2013) describe ideological dilemmas as a rhetorical tool that allows an exploration of how two or more conflicting ideals co-exist, thus creating a balanced political discussion within a certain political domain (e.g. education), without leading to extremist positions. Political talk would not be possible without the use of ideological dilemmas. However, I argue that using ideological dilemmas to explore and interpret the discrepancies that earlier research and this study have highlighted in the state preschool political discourse could create a relativistic perspective on power use and

misuse when policy translates into practice. Meanwhile, contradictory perspectives and ideals on education and preschool are part of a democratic society, reflecting the multiplicity of arguments and ideologies that exist. In addition, ideological dilemmas about language diversity in preschool have been shown to produce the driving force that some practitioners need in order to work towards implementing the conflicting ideals articulated in the preschool curriculum (Fredriksson & Lindgren Eneflo, 2019).

There is a risk that, when exploring preschool as an ideological dilemma, all of the conflicting arguments that are presented within a discourse can seem equally valid, depending on the context in which they become embedded. While ideological dilemmas are a prerequisite for understanding the functioning of a society that acknowledges a multiplicity of views and allows for their expression, social inequalities could become more difficult to pin down in light of the relativism produced by swinging between ideals. It ignores the connection between language and power and focuses instead on the ideological backbone that supports a certain narrative. Deconstructing language use in order to reveal and understand how power is constructed and perpetuated in discourse is the driving force behind CDA. This endeavor, and proclaiming to be critical of the present social order, have been questioned by some scholars (Billig, 2003) and accused of imposing political labels on everyday and mundane texts. When focusing on technical details, the wider picture that should be captured by the critical analyst can go missing.

This critique is not completely valid, I would argue, because, while studying a text or an interaction from the perspective of power relations can appear like an imposition, politics and practices of domination are inescapable aspects of societal organization. Besides, as Haugen (2021) shows, individuals tend to talk about things with which they are comfortable, and I find that choosing what to talk about is in itself a power exercise. This was shown by Lina, who felt as though she was pushed up against a wall when the preschool practitioner was steering the conversation.

Preschool is a political institution which, according to the state preschool political discourse, aims to nurture future citizens who will abide by democratic values. The families I have studied are also political subjects defined according to their legal status as immigrants and as parents (or guardians). Power relations and domination are mappable through examining how social actor representation is textured in the discursive practices examined. In this study, immigrant parents, for example, were constructed in the state preschool political discourse as being without agency. This was achieved by using excluding linguistic tools of nominalization and backgrounding, rendering their participation dispensable. This view of immigrant parents is clearly demonstrable, since very few active verbs (acts of participation) were combined with

immigrant parents, as shown in the examples presented in chapter seven. In contrast, in their own writings, through the use of first person singular and plural pronouns and active verb forms, the parents portrayed themselves as agents contributing to the processes of educating and integrating their children.

Piškur et al. (2021) explain that the values and goals that prevail in a society are reflected in its steering documents, e.g. educational curricula. According to these authors, the Swedish preschool curriculum of 1998 focuses on the future and encourages the competent model of childhood. This considers competition as essential for how human beings interact, and subsequently creates the foundations for integration and segregation mechanisms. Piškur et al. (2021) interpret this as a consequence of the neo-liberal politics that has started the process of selling and privatizing Swedish public schools and preschools, pulling away from the Nordic model, which is based on the principles of social justice and equality, and thus making the vulnerable ones even more vulnerable. I argue that, in spite of preaching democratic values, ideological hints in educational curricula can hinder the democratic evolution and functioning of educational space.

Ignoring the textures of power would be to turn a blind eye to evident constructions of social hierarchies. To claim that critical discourse analysts impose political labels is redundant because the subject of examination here is already politicized and needs no imposition of such labels. Furthermore, using the three-dimensional model of discourse provides a holistic approach to analyzing it, i.e. both taking into account the linguistic features and arrangements of the text and locating it within the wider social and discursive practice. As in this study where, with the help of Fairclough's (1992) three-dimensional model, a historical dimension was added to the data by tracing how preschool policy has evolved with regard to defining immigrant parents and children.

Ideological dilemmas and criticisms of CDA aside, the present study confirms the importance of culturally aware work that was proposed by the state preschool political discourse and was based on cultivating an awareness of the differences and similarities that exist between cultures and values. This study demonstrates how the informants' views on certain aspects are similar to those articulated by the state preschool political discourse. It highlights the need for each to develop an understanding of the other, based on similarities, and not only differences, which highlights the resemblance in the views and attitudes that exist between immigrant families and the host society. A critical reflection of preschool's expectations of immigrant families is crucial for the practitioners meeting with these families, as shown by earlier research and argued for in the state preschool political discourse. In spite of the benefits of such an approach, it maintains the perception of us and them when meetings occur

between preschool representatives and immigrant families. In a multicultural society characterized by diversity, paradoxically enough, the construction of us and them seems inevitable, because us and them become the forms into which the multiplicity of desires and views are poured. Therefore, this study argues for the importance of adopting an approach based on equality that highlights similarities and shared perceptions and expectations, rather than only differences. A focus on differences alone accentuates the contrast between *us* and *them*, while a focus on both shared and divergent norms and values creates a relationship of us *with* them, rather than us *and* them.

Furthermore, from a critical point of view, the detected similarities in views and perceptions could be interpreted as the result of a dominant global discourse, and highlighting these similarities could be expected to consolidate unequal power relations. On the other hand, seeing the similarities can also be understood in terms of the universality and humanity of concerns and issues related to immigration, parenthood and childhood.

Sammanfattning på svenska

Kapitel 1–4: Inledning

Det övergripande syftet med denna doktorsavhandling är att undersöka de föreställningar som nyanlända invandrarfamiljer har av den svenska förskolan, och föreställningarna om dessa familjer såsom de uttryckts i den svenska statliga förskolepolitiska diskursen under den senaste femtioårsperioden. För detta ändamål använder studien kritisk diskursanalys (CDA), såsom föreslagits av Norman Fairclough (1992). CDA tillämpas både som teori och som analytisk metod. Studien är empiriskt förankrad och lånar Faircloughs tredimensionella diskursmodell för analys av 19 texter producerade av nyanlända syriska familjer, tillsammans med policy- och styrdokument som handlar om förskolan i relation till invandring. Samtliga deltagare i studien var syriska nyanlända flyktingar som kom till Sverige på grund av inbördeskriget som bröt ut i Syrien. Texterna som ingår i den statliga diskursen om förskolan är producerade av olika sorters experter/forskare, tjänstemän och yrkesverksamma personer. De statliga texterna som studeras är: SOU 1972:26 Förskolan 1; SOU 1972:27 Förskolan 2; SOU 1997:157 Att erövra omvärlden; Förslag till läroplan för förskolan; SOU 2020:67 Förskola för alla barn; Proposition 1973:136 förskoleverksamhetens utbyggnad och organisation; Proposition 1984/85:209 Förskola för alla barn; Proposition 1997/98:93 Läroplan för förskolan; Socialstyrelsen 1987:3 Pedagogiskt program för förskolan; läroplanen för förskolan Lpfö98 (Regeringskansliet 1998) och dess tre revideringar från Skolverket 2006, 2011, 2016; samt den nya läroplanen för förskolan Lpfö18 (Skolverket 2018).

Studien fokuserar på två huvudteman som är dominerande i båda texterna (språkinlärning i form av svenska och modersmål samt tillhörighet), och visar hur de används för att uttrycka och tilldela agens. I studien ägnas särskild uppmärksamhet åt användningen av verb, pronomen och adjektiv som språkliga parametrar för att analysera representationer av relations- och handlingsprocesser, samt sociala aktörsrepresentationer. Studien består av tre empiriska kapitel: Nyanlända invandrarfamiljers diskurs om språkinlärning, nyanlända invandrarfamiljers diskurs om tillhörighet och förskola och nyanlända invandrarbarn som en angelägenhet för förskolan. De två första kapitlen visar på hur föräldrarna skriver fram sin egen och barnens agens i förhållande till språkinlärning och att vara på förskolan, vilket återspeglas i deras användning av verb

och pronomen. Det sista kapitlet visar hur den statliga förskolepolitiska diskursen under en femtioårsperiod har uppfattat och konstruerat invandrarbarn och deras föräldrar i relation till förskolan.

Analysen avslöjar hur föräldrarnas och statens diskursiva praktiker om förskolan som en plats för språkinläring och tillhörighet kan likna och skilja sig från varandra. Till exempel, i den statliga diskursen definieras invandrarbarns språkinläring och tillhörighet utifrån deras behov och invandrarerfarenhet. I föräldrarnas texter lyfts dessa teman i relation till barnens utveckling och välmående. Jag ska nu sammanfatta de empiriska kapitlen och studiens resultat.

Kapitel 5: Nyanlända invandrarfamiljers diskurser om språkinläring

Jag fokuserade på hur föräldrarna uttryckte sin agens i förhållande till sina barn, till förskolan och till den statliga förskolepolitiska diskursen. Särskilt fokus låg på hur föräldrarna skrev om tiden, och huruvida förändring och förvandling kom till uttryck i deras texter. Föräldrarnas texter skilde sig åt i dessa frågor, vilket förklarar varför jag har pekat ut dessa teman för en mer djupgående analys. Jag presenterar dem som: agens genom känslomässiga reaktioner, agens som kommunikationsfärdigheter och integration i världssamhället, agens genom motstånd och acceptans, agens som språkfärdighet i form av att prata eller förstå, och agens genom att lära sig dagliga praktiker.

I undersökningen av föräldrarnas diskursiva praktiker och deras representationer av sociala aktörer, användes många verb för att understryka agens och för att visa barnens deltagande. Framställningen av ett socialt aktörskap gjordes via pronomen, substantiv och namn. Föräldrarnas sätt att använda verb och pronomen visade vilken position de gav sig själva i olika handlingar och platser, och ifall de framställdes som aktiva eller passiva. I hemmamiljön användes *jag/min* mer frekvent, medan i en institutionell miljö, andra pronomen *de/mig/oss* blev mer tydliga. Detta gällde dock inte barnen; *han/hon* användes ofta för att representera barnen som sociala aktörer både i förskolan och i hemmet. Dessutom visade det sig att föräldrarna inte exkluderade förskolpedagogerna från sitt skrivande. Agens blev en konstituerande del för vad de valde att skriva om och för att uttrycka sina föreställningar om den svenska förskolan.

Kapitel 6: Nyanlända invandrarfamiljers diskurser om tillhörighet och förskola

Fokus i detta kapitel låg på hur föräldrarna uppfattade sin relation till förskolan, liksom till såväl ursprungssamhället som värdsamhället samt till sina barn.

Detta möjliggjordes genom att analysera texterna med hjälp av olika språkliga verktyg, för att förstå hur de positionerade sig i förhållande till den plats/kultur som de hade lämnat och den som de hade hamnat i. Informanternas diskursiva praktiker speglade många teman som finns i den statliga förskolepolitiska diskursen och som användes för att beskriva egna upplevelser av tillhörighet och icke-tillhörighet i relation till förskolan och det svenska samhället som helhet. Föräldrarna var noga med att jämföra sina erfarenheter i Sverige med erfarenheterna de bar med sig hemifrån, detta skedde framförallt genom ett upprepat användande av plats- och tidsadverb. Några av de föreställningar om barn som kom fram i deras texter var: barnet som en samhällelig angelägenhet, barnet som socialt och barnet som kompetent eller inkompetent. Föräldrarna beskrev vikten av barnets välbefinnande och hur barnen utvecklade sitt lärande genom att utforska världen utanför hemmet och familjen. Barnets delaktighet och rätten att leva ett normalt liv beskrevs tydligt i texterna. Temat integration, och de ansträngningar som föräldrarna gör för att integrera, återfanns också i datan, liksom temat om vi och dem.

Kapitel 7: Nyanlända invandrabarn som en angelägenhet för förskolan

I detta kapitel analyserades invandring som fenomen med fokus på hur invandrabarn och föräldrar beskrivs i de statliga texterna. Jag gjorde en språkorienterad analys av hur invandrabarn och föräldrar konstruerades i de olika texterna under en femtioårsperiod. Genom hela kapitlet argumenterar jag för att det fanns en dubbel diskurs om hur förskolan uppfattade invandrare. För det första presenterade diskursen invandrare i positiva ordalag, som förstärkande element i den svenska förskolan och samhället. För det andra, framställde invandrabarnen som i särskilt behov av stöd. Dessa teman löpte parallellt under hela perioden och producerade en komplexa, och ibland motsägelsefulla, diskurser. I den statliga diskursen konstruerades invandrabarnen som sociala aktörer. Deras agens blev synlig genom hur deras deltagande beskrevs i texterna, dessutom har invandrabarnen klassificerats som olika kategorier genom olika perioder. Representationen av invandrarföräldrar som sociala aktörer, via verb, är praktiskt taget svårt att upptäcka. Genom olika språkliga verktyg, såsom nominalisering och opersonlig representation, blev föräldrarna osynliga, vilket resulterade i att deras agens blev mindre påtaglig än barnens agens.

Kapitel 8: Resultat

Betydelsen av att lära sig svenska artikulerades i föräldrarnas texter och i de statliga texterna. I föräldrarnas texter användes svenskaspråksinlärning som ett sätt för både föräldrar och barn att aktivera sin agens i förhållande till förskolan. I den statliga diskursen framställdes svenskainlärning som ett sätt att fostra invandrarbarn och hjälpa dem att få en lyckad skolgång och framtid. Den statliga diskursen beskrev också vad som förväntades av pedagogerna och invandrarfamiljerna. Modersmålsundervisningen i förskolan hade en viktig plats i den statliga diskursen, medan föräldrarna inte beskrev den som en angelägenhet för förskolan. Föräldrarna skrev i stället om sin egen roll i att överföra det egna modersmålet till sina barn i hemmet. Parallellt med detta konstruerades svenska som viktigt för barnens och föräldrarnas integration. I föräldrarnas texter understryker föräldrarna sina roller för barnens språkutveckling och integration, medan den statliga förskolepolitiska diskursen lade ansvaret för integration på förskolans pedagoger. Det var de som konstruerades som aktiva sociala aktörer i dessa frågor.

Även om leken konstruerades som relevant i båda texterna, lyftes inte de vardagliga praktikerna fram lika mycket i den statliga diskursen som i föräldrarnas texter. Dessa praktiker beskrevs av föräldrarna som essentiella för barnets självkänsla och självförtroende. Analysen visade också att föräldrarnas texter kan förstås som ett sätt för föräldrar och deras barn att ge uttryck för tillhörighet. Barnens tillhörighet blev främst till barngruppen, medan föräldrarnas tillhörighet uttrycktes annorlunda. De kopplade frågor om respekt och bemötande i relation till tillhörigheten med hemlandet medan den fysiska och omedelbara tillhörigheten kopplades till värdsamhället. I den förskolepolitiska diskursen blev beskrivningen av invandrarfamiljers tillhörighet mer kategorisk, det vill säga att invandrarföräldrar och barn kategoriserades efter sina behov och kulturella bakgrund, och främst utan hänvisning till att vara i besittning av egen agens.

I de statliga texterna, fanns beskrivningar av Sverige som det *nya landet* och svenska barn som det *nya landets barn*. Världlandet porträtterades som *nytt* för invandrarbarnet/föräldern. Detta åtföljdes av krav på pedagogerna att bli kulturmedvetna i sitt arbete i förskolan. För genomförandet av detta, uppmanades pedagogerna att visa empati, och öka sina kunskaper om svensk kulturell mångfald, samt att kunna ifrågasätta egna värderingar och antaganden. Min analys visar att dessa argument framfördes redan på 1970-talet, men att invandrarbarn med tiden allt mer konstruerades som barn i behov av stöd. Genom att enbart betona dessa barns invandringsupplevelse och lyfta upp vad de saknar istället för vad de har med sig och kan, skapas i den statliga diskursen en specifik och ensidig förståelse av invandring.

Datan i den statliga diskursen visade också att förskolan framställs som en representant för monokulturalism samtidigt som den ska främja mångkultur. En sådan dubbelhet skulle kunna beskrivas som ett ideologiskt dilemma, dvs.

att svensk förskola förväntas främja både monokulturalism och mångkultur på samma gång, vilket gör förskolans uppdrag svårt att tolka och uppnå. Det skapar en ambivalens mellan auktoritet och dominans (monokulturalism) å ena sidan och jämlikhet och demokrati (mångkultur) å andra sidan. Billig et al. (1988) förklarar att undervisning i sig är en handling där ideologin representeras. Konceptualiseringen av förskolan som ett ideologiskt dilemma i relation till invandring och integration gör att två oppositionella ideal kan artikuleras samtidigt. Medan ideologiska dilemman, enligt Billig, är en förutsättning för att förstå hur ett demokratiskt samhälle fungerar, kan sociala ojämlikheter bli svårare att upptäcka i ljuset av den relativism som produceras när motsatta ideal verkar samtidigt.

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Appendices

1. Letter of Informed Consent

New Arrival Immigrant Families and the Swedish Preschool

This study will examine how newly arrived families from Syria experience Swedish preschool.

If you agree to participate in the study, I will ask you (as a parent) to write a story about your experiences of preschool in Syria and Sweden, giving your impressions of Swedish preschool as a physical and social place, your encounters with the staff and with other parents, and what, before coming here, you imagined Swedish preschools would be like, as well as your general fears, worries and expectations. This will broaden our knowledge about what it means to be a newly arrived family in its first encounter with Swedish preschool.

I plan to establish contact with 3–5 preschools and ask approximately 20 newly arrived families if they are willing to take part in the study. The whole study, including the results, will respect the participants' identities, which will not appear in the presentation of the research results at an individual level, but only at a group level (parents). I will not make any registry or list of the participants in which I state your names, personal registration numbers or addresses.

My supervisors and I alone will have access to the research data, and the results will be published in international peer-reviewed journals related to the subject/s of my research and in a doctoral thesis. Here too, the anonymity of the participants will be guaranteed by not mentioning your names or any other information that might reveal your identities.

Participation in the study is totally voluntary and unconditional; in other words, you can withdraw from the study at any time without explaining why. In order to withdraw, you can contact me directly on my mobile number: 0723 019 3 68 or email: wiji.bohme.shomary@buv.su.se

You are also welcome to contact my supervisor, Professor Anne-Li Lindgren, with any questions you might have about the study. Professor Anne-Li Lindgren: mobile number: 072 1474190, email: anne-li.lindgren@buv.su.se. Wiji Bohme Shomary, PhD student, Child and Youth Studies, Stockholm University.

2. Informed Consent Form

I declare that I have read the information about the study that will be conducted by Wiji Bohme Shomary, PhD candidate at Stockholm University. I will mark below Yes/No to participating in the study.

- Yes, I agree to participate in the study by writing a story about my experiences and meetings with preschool in Sweden/ New-arrival families.
- No, I am not interested in participating in the study.

Date and signature:

Address:

Phone number:

Email:

Research has shown that educational policies are crucial for the study of migration and integration. Through policies and practices, teachers and preschool practitioners get socialized with a variety of discursive practices and ideologies that become prevailing in educational settings, and preschools are shown to be places that are not neutral, neither politically nor culturally. Furthermore, preschool is one of the first arenas in which new arrival immigrant families interact with the host society, and this means that the meeting between preschool practitioners and immigrant families during this period is decisive for how future partnerships between home and preschool is affected and developed. This interdisciplinary study explores the discourses new arrival immigrant families draw upon when writing about their perceptions of the Swedish preschool, and similarly the discourses that can be found in policy documents with regard to immigrant children and parents in preschool. Language learning and belonging are two themes that were produced by the informants and the state preschool political discourse. How agency is being activated and ascribed or stripped away in these texts, become visible through analyzing how these themes are constructed and represented, for instance via social actor representation.



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