

# Multilingualism as Policy and Practices in Elementary School: Powerful Tools for Inclusion of Newly Arrived Pupils

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Received: 21 April 2017 / Revised: 16 May 2017 / Accepted: 22 May 2017

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## Abstract

In this article, language policy is analysed in relation to multilingual practices in primary school through an understanding of the policy on different levels – as management, perception and practice. The article is based on longitudinal ethnographic action research that was conducted parallel to local school development. Here we draw on material from observations, interviews and notes written by participating teachers when arguing that engaging with policy processes may constitute a powerful tool for school development. In this case, development of language policies that include students' diverse linguistic backgrounds, supported students in their language development in the bridging between L2-support and work in the mainstream classroom. The conclusion is that the promotion of language policies that oppose hierarchies of power is crucial in terms of social change as it promotes social equity and fosters change. Involvement in terms of policy processes may shift the boundaries for what is possible in education and may thus constitute a powerful tool in school development.


**Keywords:** Multilingualism, Language policy, Practices, Identity texts, Policy levels

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## Introduction

In this article, relations between language policy and language practices in elementary school will be analysed, building on empirical material created through an action research project and documentation of local school development. The action research project was carried out in 2013-2016, when local school development had already commenced. The article takes a critical perspective, highlighting questions concerning multilingual work in a local school context with the aim of analysing multilingual work in school as policy and practice. In the article, we argue that when educational practices create space for students' diverse linguistic resources, there is an effect on who gets to be heard and on how power

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and roles among teachers and students are distributed in ways that increase students' engagement and their ability to secure an identity position.

The action project was developed through collaboration between the researcher, school administrators and teachers in one Swedish elementary school that will here be called Forest School. In 2012, changes in Swedish law on family immigration resulted in a high number of newly arrived students. Administrators at the municipal level were anxious to create good conditions for the integration and inclusion of these students that would facilitate positive development for all students in the municipality. The action project and the local school development that aimed to develop education at Forest School were part of their plans. Here, material from a language workshop for newly arrived students in grades 3 to 6 that was held at Forest School, along with material from grades 4 and 5, will be used, with a focus on language norms for multilingual educational practices. The material from the workshop was created by the teacher, while the researcher created material from grades 4 and 5.

Research on education in contexts where students have varied linguistic backgrounds has over recent decades stressed the importance of developing educational forms that include and stimulate students' whole linguistic repertoire (see, for example, Thomas & Collier, 1997, 2002; Cummins, 2000, 2001; García, 2009; Giampapa, 2010; Cummins & Early, 2011). When both the experiences of students in the dominant language (in this case Swedish) and their linguistic resources have a place in school, then their involvement and chances of academic success are enhanced. In Sweden, research on and experiences with multilingual educational programmes have been somewhat limited (see, for example, Svensson 2015; Torpsten & Svensson, 2017; Wedin 2017a, Wessman, 2016; 2017). Furthermore, at an international level, research is limited, but important contributions to the field have been presented by, among others, García (2009), Cummins et al. (2015), Hélot & Young (2005), Vesteraas Danbolt & Iversen Kulbrandstad (2013), Hopewell (2017), Mary & Young (2017) and Slotte & Ahlbom (2017).

Elementary school in Sweden today offers different opportunities for the use of different languages in education, and multilingual students have the right to mother tongue education (under certain conditions) as well as to study guidance in their mother tongue through assistants when necessary (SFS 1994:1194). At the same time, research and reports show that school administrators and teachers have difficulty creating educational forms that are inclusive of students' varied linguistic repertoires (see, for example, Bunar (2010), Axelsson & Magnusson (2012), and Skolinspektionen (2014). Also difficulties concerning the adaptation of subject-specific education as a means to support multilingual students in their learning have been reported (Axelsson & Jacobsson, 2010), as have practical and organisational problems related to study guidance and mother tongue education (Reath Warren, 2016; Rosén, Straszer & Wedin, 2017).

Creating language policies at the local level where language use and language choice in educational practices are made visible is one way to make those involved aware of policies that otherwise tend to be implicit. In the project on which this article is based, development of local educational policy to support multilingual students was an important aspect. Drawing on action research and local school development, we will analyse how language policies at the management level are at play through practices at the classroom level.

#### *Language policy in education*

The theoretical framework for this article is a critical one where social power relations and their reflection in educational structures and interactional patterns are viewed as primary reasons for under-performance (see, for example, Fairclough, 1989/2001;

Pennycook, 2001; Canagarajah, 2013). Cummins (2005) argues for a view of policy as not only being a mandate prescribed by authorities but also as including both the assumptions that affect the opportunities students have to use and maintain their linguistic resources and the attitudes that teachers and students develop in relation to the status of linguistic varieties. Spolsky (2004) too argued for the perception of language practices as expressions of policy. To study language policy in educational settings, Ricento and Hornberger (1996) created the metaphor of an onion where policy is perceived to consist of different layers. This was further developed by Hornberger and Johnson (2017), who argued both for the use of ethnography to illuminate local interpretation and implementation of language policy as well as for increased understanding of how spaces for multilingual practices, in terms of both ideology and implementation, may be opened and closed. They argue for the importance of not only analysing policy texts but also of basing policy analysis on an understanding that has its basis in ethnographic studies of the context with focus on how human agents act as interpreters between policy levels.

The relation between policy and practices is expressed by Bonacina-Pugh (2012) in the form of three policy levels: 1) language management, what Shohamy (2006) calls "declared language policy", 2) perceived language policy and 3) practised language policy, with Shohamy 2006 "de facto language policy". The three levels illustrate the close relationship between policy and practice while also including the importance of perception of language policy. We find the model by Bonacina-Hugh with three levels particularly relevant for our analysis here, as it relates management level – in our case school administration and the collective creation of official policies through studies, collective discussions and the creation of policy documents – to perceptions and practices at the classroom level. We will here follow Hornberger and Johnson (2017) in that we focus on practices that promote social equity and foster diversity.

#### *Multilingual educational practices*

The strong monolingual norm in Sweden, as in great parts of the western world (Lainio, 1999), becomes visible in educational contexts where only Swedish is the accepted language and where different languages are kept clearly apart. When teachers rebuke students with "here we talk Swedish" and argue that the use of other languages excludes those who do not understand them, they simultaneously contribute to the exclusion of students who have yet to master Swedish. In this way, language becomes a medium for exclusion rather than inclusion.

The importance of developing multilingual educational practices is stressed by extensive research, such as that of Thomas and Collier (1997, 2002), Cummins (2000, 2001) and García (2009), which shows that support for multilingual development not only promotes multilingual development but also allows for cognitive advantages (Cummins, 2000; García 2009). García claims that the inclusion of different languages in education can be nothing except reasonable for children in contemporary globalised society (2009:5). By including the linguistic repertoires of the students, education becomes meaningful to them while encouraging social justice, tolerance and diversity (García, 2009:6).

In traditional forms of bilingual education, patterns of language use may be characterised as "double monolingualism" as the different languages are separated from each other (Musk, 2010; Jonsson, 2012; Hélot, 2014). One such example is the bilingual education that has been offered to some Sami- and Finnish-speaking students in Sweden, as well as similar educational forms in Wales with Welsh and in Ireland with Irish (Musk, 2010). Studies from classrooms where minority languages are used have revealed that often only the teacher's use of the minority language is tolerated, not that of the students, and that teachers often use the minority language, that is the language that is not dominant in school, mainly to rebuke and sometimes to explain when students fail to understand (King,

2001; Wedin, 2004, 2005). This may increase the stigmatisation of the minority language, as well as its speakers.

Research on interaction in contexts when teachers are not present has revealed patterns of interaction that may be characterised as translanguaging, that is interaction where different linguistic resources are used without clear borders between varieties that are usually viewed as separate, named languages (Musk, 2010; Jonsson, 2014; Lindahl, 2015; Allard & Wedin, 2017). Translanguaging is used to refer to complex language practices as well as to educational methods that include these practices (García, 2009). Hélot (2014) describes a situation where according to official norms, different languages are to be treated as strictly separate, but where she found students to be translating between languages and reflecting over the relation between words in the different languages, as well as some teachers to be challenging the official norms by teaching using both languages in parallel.

In different projects in the Nordic countries (Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Iceland and Finland), younger students have been stimulated to use their varied linguistic resources in conjunction with emergent literacy (for example, Møller-Daugaard & Laursen, 2012; Pietikäinen & Pitkänen-Huhta, 2013; Vesteraas Danbolt & Iversen Kulbrandstad, 2013). Møller-Daugaard and Laursen demonstrated that when preschool children were given support in their multilingualism, their opportunities to agency increased. The children took initiatives that widened their linguistic space while they simultaneously sometimes took the role of expert through their diverse language competence.

The increasing use of the concept translanguaging and its role in education (García & Flores, 2012, Paulsrud, et. al. 2017) has resulted in the creation of new forms of dynamic, multilingual educational practices. Recognition of the complexity in the language practices that students are included in may result in the multilingual and dynamic interaction patterns that they engage in outside the classroom continuing inside the classroom. This enables the development not only of skills in different named languages, but also of skills that are necessary when navigating multilingual contexts, such as linguistic negotiation, translation and explanation, as well as when switching between diverse linguistic resources and using them in a flexible manner. Multilingualism includes diverse modalities, not least digital, and when it is combined with literacy education, students are given the opportunity to develop what Hornberger calls biliteracy (1990), that is diversity that also concerns literacy, (cfr multilingual literacies (Martin-Jones & Jones, 2000) and pluriliteracy practices (García, Bartlett & Kleifgren, 2007)). In the practices that will be presented here, students were encouraged to use their diverse linguistic repertoires both orally and through literacy.

#### *Language policies that enable or prevent identity development*

Language policies in educational contexts are often implicit. At the school level, a monolingual norm becomes visible when, for example, only Swedish is represented in written form on school premises, such as in classrooms and in the library. Younger children in particular are sensitive towards such implicit norms. When the language that dominates in the home is not made visible in written form through books, posters, signs and other material that represent the school domain, this signals to the students that this language is perceived to be of less value at school. Research on multilingual practices and on language norms in school contexts may draw attention to social tensions and simultaneously to the diversity of voices.

Cummins, Hu, Markus and Montero (2015) claim that patterns for learning/not learning for students from different social groups relate directly to the construction of identities, investment and affirmation. They argue that educational practices that include students'

various resources affirm their diverse identities. By developing a language policy for education that stimulates the use of students' whole linguistic repertoire, opportunities are created for them to see themselves as competent and capable, and for them to develop what Manyak (2004) calls identities of competence. When implicit ideologies are made explicit through the construction of an official language policy at the school level, attitudes and values are made visible in ways that enable positive change. Thus students develop learning strategies that all learners use – that being to use what they already know to develop what they do not yet know (Velasco & García, 2014). This then becomes a way to take advantage of diversity as a resource.

#### *Multilingual writing through identity texts*

Through a teacher-initiated project in Canada, forms for inclusion of students' various languages in a classroom were created with educational strategies called identity texts (Schechter & Cummins, 2003; Giampapa, 2010; Cummins & Early, 2011; Cummins et. al., 2015). Identity texts direct focus towards the affirmation of identities, social power relations and literacy engagement (Cummins, 2007). Creative writing, including teacher and student responses, is given space for the expression of identities and the reproduction of identity. This is particularly valuable for students whose language, culture and religion have been devalued by society. Thus work with identity texts and with literacy practices affirming identities may serve to increase interest among students (Cummins et.al, 2015). The inclusion of existing linguistic resources of newly arrived students who are still in the early stages of learning Swedish, may mean opportunities for inclusion in activities in the mainstream classroom and also increased involvement as they are permitted to use a larger proportion of their cognitive capacity.

In these projects students were encouraged to write identity texts. The inclusion of students' varied linguistic resources through identity texts creates processes – cognitive, linguistic and social – that challenge oppressive power structures (see, for example, Sleeter 2011). Thus affirmation of students' identities in school may counteract oppressive forces in society that devalue students and groups (Manyak, 2004; Kanu, 2011; Sleeter, 2011).

Here the enactment of language policies through practices at the classroom level will be analysed in accordance with Bonacina-Pugh (2012) as on three levels, management, perceptions and practices - with the levels depending on and merging into each other. Thus policy as perceptions will here be understood as being made visible in practices, while policy as management will be understood as creating and being created by perceptions and practices at the everyday level.

#### **Methods**

Material for this article was created through an action research project that was carried out parallel to local school development projects. The action research had a longitudinal, ethnographic approach and was carried out in close collaboration between the researcher and the teachers. In studies of practices and policy in relation to language and learning, ethnographically inspired methods offer tools to create both an understanding of the complex and multi-layered phenomena that are at stake (Zeichner 2001, Canagarajah 2006, Hornberger & Johnson 2017) as well as knowledge where both the researcher and teachers are active participants in processes of change (Vesteraas Danbolt & Iversen Kulbrandstad, 2013).

Thus the goal for action research is to create practical improvements, innovations, changes and development of the educational practice while contributing to teachers' understanding of their own practices (Zuber-Skerritt 1996). The aim of this action research was to develop educational practices that supported students' various linguistic

resources. The central base for action research is that the collaboration is characterised by mutual respect. Within this project, four types of data were created: 1) field notes from classroom observations, 2) audio recordings, 3) student and teacher interviews, 4) artefacts such as textbooks, student texts and digital material. Throughout this project, the role of the teachers was to plan and deliver instruction, and the researcher's role was to initiate sub-projects and to collect, process and analyse data. The researcher, participating teachers and school administrators met continuously to exchange experiences, discuss, reflect and plan actions. For this article, mainly observations from two school years (240 hours), teacher interviews, local policy documents and focus group interviews with students were used.

As part of the work with local school development that preceded and continued parallel to the action research, the school organised education for the newly arrived students, which included, among other things, the creation of a language workshop for students. In this article, material from this workshop in the form of plans, teacher's notes and evaluations made by the teacher have been used, as well as artefacts such as multilingual student texts and digital material.

In Forest School, a majority of the students actively use other languages than Swedish at home, and during the project many newly arrived students were enrolled at the school. Teachers and school administrators faced a challenging situation in that there was a lack of competent personnel, and a great deal of time was spent finding forms for collaboration between different categories of personnel, such as study guidance assistants, mother tongue teachers and teachers of Swedish as a second language. For further information about the action research, see Wedin (2017a and b) and for the development projects, see Wessman (2016, 2017).

## **Results**

When this action research project was carried out, staff at Forest School had already been working for a long time on developing language policy documents. Local school development was initiated and implemented by a few teachers in cooperation with the headmaster at the school. To analyse how policy at the management level is implemented, we will begin by describing the developmental work with language policy. We will then present practices where multilingual norms are exposed from two of the sub-projects in the action research and from the language workshop that was held. Finally we will analyse relations between different levels of language policy as they appear here.

### *Developing local school policy*

As early as the beginning of the 2000s, the municipality had begun training teachers at this school and another in Swedish as a second language: the courses corresponded to 30 ECTS. Starting 2010, personnel began working with language and content-integrated learning as a central goal at the school, and they also established a book club in the form of a reading circle. This resulted in discussions about attitudes in relation to the multilingual students at the school and the factors in place for their learning. At this time, existing preparatory classes for newly arrived students were discontinued and these students were integrated into mainstream classes. Several local documents were produced through collective discussions, such as a plan for students who were taking Swedish as a second language, which included a description of their assessment and the organisation of the education. Discussions in the staff team and in what we will term a research circle entitled Newly Arrived Students' Learning resulted in changes to language policy. The existing monolingual norm, that being that Swedish was the only language to be used at school except for in lessons in English and the students' mother tongue, was abandoned. Here it is

worthwhile mentioning that the headmaster made it mandatory for all personnel, including dinner-hall staff and the janitor, to participate in a study circle.

Some teachers applied for and received funds for personnel exchange with schools in Canada and Great Britain. The exchange with Canada involved staff members visiting teachers and observed education there, while teachers and researchers from Canada visited the school here in Sweden. The exchange with Great Britain involved groups of preschool teachers, study guidance assistants, mother tongue teachers, teachers and school administrators from Sweden shadowing their British colleagues. Altogether, three trips to Mississauga, Canada, and three trips to Manchester, Great Britain, 1-2 weeks each, were made with 32 individuals participating. This international cooperation aimed at collectively developing different educational forms and methods so that the knowledge and linguistic skills of multilingual students could be utilised, supported and developed.

At the time of, and associated with, the research circle and the development projects, there was an ongoing process in which language norms were discussed and elements from this were formalised in documents. Apart from the aforementioned guidelines for the teaching of Swedish as a second language, an international action plan was developed, as were an action plan for the reception of newly arrived students whose mother tongue was not Swedish; guidelines for study guidance in the mother tongue; and a policy document for newly arrived students' learning. The discussions resulted in the initiation of school-wide measures, such as an introduction week about moral values at the beginning of the school year during which every class was invited to present its work in diverse languages and modalities. Another activity was the introduction of language of the month, which involved teachers, students, school administrators and other personnel learning a few words and expressions in that particular language. Arabic was, for example, chosen to be language of the month when the school was to receive some newly arrived students from Syria. Student languages were also made visible in the school corridors in different ways.

The multilingual policy that was developed was implemented in different ways by individual teachers in their classrooms. In one classroom, the teacher used students' various languages as a basis for work in Swedish by asking them to compare grammatical features between the languages. In another class, mathematical tables were created in the languages spoken in the class. Within the research circle, a language inventory for the whole school was completed by the headmaster and displayed at the school entrance to make the linguistic diversity visible.

In the language workshop, an identity language map was created, as was a diagram displaying the strongest language of the 28 newly arrived students together with their geographical origin. The students were encouraged to write in their strongest language and then to give a presentation in a language of their choice, in many cases the strongest language alternated with Swedish. One student wrote an identity map and presented it in Arabic, after which the study guidance assistant translated it into Swedish. These activities resulted in a high level of involvement and interest among students.

An example of when the multilingual norm was made visible in students' learning practices comes from an observation in grade 6. During a lesson in mathematics when students were working individually on their textbooks, the researcher observed that one student was counting by talking loudly to herself while writing figures in the air with her fingers. As the language she was using was not one that the researcher could understand, she asked the student which language it was, and the student answered that she was using Turkish, as this was the language she had previously used at school, although she spoke Kurmanji at home. The fact that neither the teacher nor students reacted when she talked Turkish in the classroom is a sign of the multilingual norm. For this student, it meant that she could use her earlier skills both in mathematics and Turkish to develop new skills.





Picture 1. Language of the month, Arabic.

Here we conclude that what had earlier been an informal school policy was, in this way, made visible, discussed and formalised. To describe the development of language policies that took place at the school, from monolingual to multilingual, it is relevant to refer to Ruiz (1984) by talking about a process in three steps – from Swedish being the only accepted language, through accepting different languages, to perceiving the linguistic skills of all as resources. Some of the effects of policy changes at the management level became visible through teachers' perceptions of students' linguistic resources and the change in classroom practices.

To show how changes at the practice levels evolved, we will start with two examples from grades 4 and 5, followed by examples from the language workshop for newly arrived students.

#### Multilingual story-writing in grades 4 and 5

Following the local developmental work, teachers in different classes planned how to include students' multilingual resources in classroom work. As part of a writing project in grade 4, where teachers wanted to stimulate students to reflect over their varied linguistic skills, students wrote stories in their different languages in the form of identity texts. The teachers started with a discussion about the different languages represented in the class and followed this with different exercises aimed at making students aware of the linguistic diversity. During lessons in English, they wrote individual presentations in English,



Swedish and, if they could, another language. Students were also interviewed by the researcher about their languages. In these interviews, attitudes and understandings in relation to language and origin emerged that challenged the traditional view of “mother tongue” and “land of origin”. Many of the children who were perceived to be of Somali origin had, for example, never been to Somalia; rather, they had lived in a variety of countries such as Kenya, Ethiopia and Italy, while their relatives were now in countries such as Denmark, Norway and Canada. When the students described their habits and practices related to language, it became clear that they navigated in different multilingual contexts through their diverse linguistic resources. They described how they had learned language in varying contexts and how they had also actively strived to broaden their linguistic resources – for example, through choice of language when playing computer games, through practising their language skills together with their parents and through learning from peers and relatives of the same age from different countries. Several children who had grown up in homes in which Swedish was dominant and who were in school denoted as “monolingual” or “Swedish speaking” talked about relatives or friends speaking other languages. Many mentioned different languages being used in the home and some said that they knew different languages because they had lived in other settings before coming to Sweden. Film, music and computer games were mentioned as media where they were able to access different languages.

When the students talked about the languages they knew, their knowledge varied from recognising the language when it was spoken or understanding single words, to mastering the language at the level expected for their age, both spoken and written. Only a few of the students claimed to be able to write well in both Swedish and another language. This was verified when they wrote their stories, when most of them needed more help writing in one of the languages. Finally, when students read their stories in front of the class, there were opportunities to re-negotiate the roles of student and teacher, when students who mastered a certain language acted as interpreter for the teacher and some of their classmates (Wedin, 2017a). This meant that students could take the role of expert, a role usually assigned to the teacher, while the teacher could take the role of novice, someone who does not know but who is willing to learn. Thus, the multilingual work created opportunities for agency and extended the linguistic space in ways similar to the study carried out by Møller-Daugaard & Laursen (2012).

In grade five, two streams, teachers wanted to develop the students’ sense of identity and decided that the students should work with their life history. The work began with the writing of “I Am poems”, where they wrote about their own characteristics. Every student then created his or her family tree after collecting information at home. In one class all texts were written in Swedish and in the other most of the students wrote in two languages – Swedish and either Somali, Kurmanji, Finnish or Arabic. All texts were collected in a book for each class and read out loud in front of the class and at a parent-teacher meeting.

One of the students, a newly arrived girl from Syria, Almas, wrote her text “How I Got Here” in Arabic. As her Swedish was still limited, she had the task explained to her by the study guidance assistant in Arabic. She first wrote her text by hand and then on a laptop. The assistant translated it together with her into Swedish, after which she wrote this version on her own on the laptop. In the text she describes how her family had been forced to flee from Syria when the war broke out. Her father had continued to Sweden and after two years in Istanbul, the rest of the family also arrived in Sweden. The whole text centres on her relatives and she finishes in this way:

When we arrived in Stockholm, my daddy and my two uncles were waiting for us.  
We got two most fantastic receptions. We went to x-town were my daddy and my

relatives lived. My uncle's wife had cooked several fantastic dishes and we all sat around the food and were happy.

Almas read the text in Arabic at the parent-teacher meeting, and the teacher read the Swedish version. By affording Alma the opportunity to use her Arabic, Almas was able to demonstrate her competence through a narrative about her background. She was also able to practise her Swedish at an age-appropriate level through the translation of her Arabic text. By reading the text aloud in front of her classmates, teacher and parents, she positioned herself as a competent girl, who could speak and write in Arabic and who was learning Swedish. Both her hand-written and computer-written texts demonstrated her competence, while giving her the opportunity to talk about parts of her life that are important in terms of her current life in Sweden. The use of Arabic in class gave her the opportunity to claim the status of a competent student despite still being a beginner in Swedish, the dominant school language.

The writing of these texts stimulated the students to express different types of identities, both identities that they wanted to claim and identities that they wanted to attain. They expressed thoughts about how they wanted to be seen in relation to others, such as family members, teachers and peers. Through this work, the students were offered opportunities to express and construct diverse identities related to language, ethnicity and social status, and also in relation to others in and outside school. Multilingual writing in one of the classes increased the opportunity for students to include linguistic aspects in their identity development. The teachers' practices here reflect the multilingual policy that was developed at the management level.

#### *Multilingual practices in the language workshop*

The language workshop was created as part of the local developmental work and aimed to offer support to those students who required it with teachers of Swedish as a second language and study guidance assistants. Individual students spent part of their school day in the workshop and the rest in the mainstream classroom. The workshop aimed to be welcoming and to offer a secure environment by making students' languages visible on walls and by encouraging them to use their diverse linguistic resources. Two of the activities that took place will here be used as examples: the work with identity texts for newly arrived students and the work with genres.

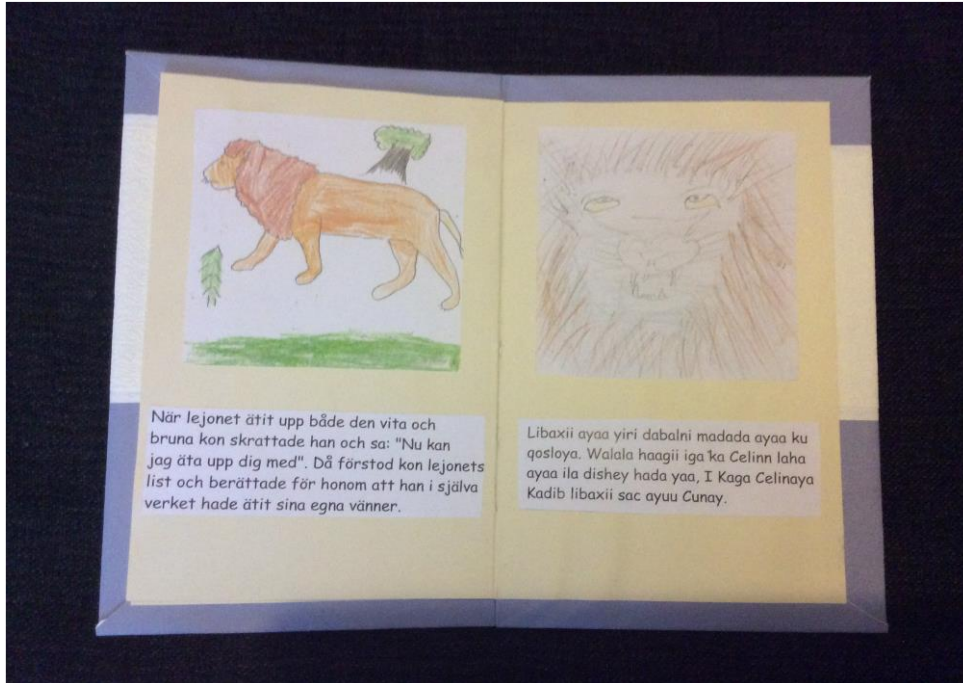
In the workshop, students were encouraged to write multilingual identity texts to serve as a bridge between their existing linguistic skills and the development of Swedish. For the newly arrived students in grade six, this meant an opportunity to use different languages to support them in their learning of Swedish, with both teachers and peers. Thus students' different languages were used as a resource, and opportunities for interaction were created that enabled students to demonstrate their competence and on occasion to adopt the role as expert in terms of language competence.

The work was introduced using a PowerPoint presentation in languages students could understand, and through the provision of linguistic support by study guidance assistants and the reading of bilingual texts written by other students. The students were told that their texts were to be read by their families, teachers and other students.

The first step was to create an idea for a story and to tell it orally in a chosen language. Then they could start to illustrate or write in their strongest language. Teachers and assistants responded and then they continued by translating the text with the help of mother tongue teachers, peers, family members and digital tools. After a second response, the texts and illustrations were pasted into individual books.

Some students had not earlier had the opportunity to learn to read and write, and had not yet tried to write a text on their own in any language, including Swedish. Initially these

students appeared to be worried, but with support from the multilingual assistants and the teacher, they managed to write their identity texts in two languages, which resulted in increased confidence in their own linguistic ability. Throughout the work, patterns related to interaction in the class changed from being dominated by the teacher and the assistants, to students taking more initiatives.



**Picture 2.** Bilingual identity text in Somali and Swedish.

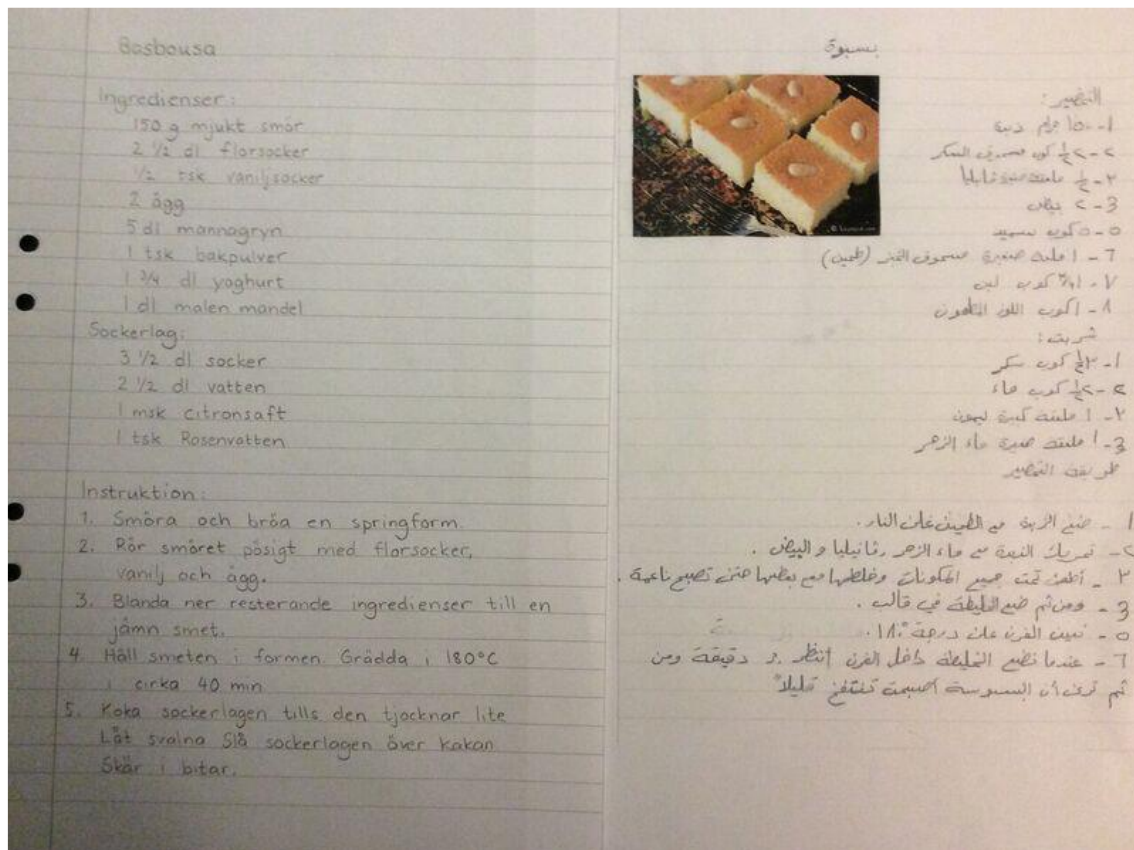
One student told a story in Swedish to the teacher, who acted as secretary, and then wrote the text on a computer with the help of speech synthesis. With the help of the mother tongue teacher, he then translated his text into Kurmanji. He practised reading at home and could then proudly read out his book in two languages. During the literacy practice sessions, students were interested, ambitious and motivated. Observations showed that as students discovered that their earlier language skills were valued, they took increased responsibility for the creation of their texts. Finally the texts were also read out to the group, the headmaster and finally to their peers in their ordinary classrooms.

Following the work with genre education that had begun at the school, as a result of the aforementioned reading circle, the whole school engaged in systematic work with different types of texts in class. Over one term, teachers decided to focus on the teaching of instructional text genre, and this was also done in the workshop to support the newly arrived students. Throughout the process, translanguaging was a strategy that was consciously used, which meant that both staff and students used their diverse linguistic resources. The initial PowerPoint presentation was in Somali, Swedish and Arabic, the most common languages among the students. The introduction was given by the teacher and assistants in several languages, where students were taught about the aim, structure and linguistic aspects of the genre, to create a basis for the subsequent writing, first together with the teacher and then individually.

To develop knowledge about instructional text, the first task was to assemble some desk lamps following illustrated mounting instructions. Students were then instructed on how to play a card game. One of the assistants initiated the use of a film from YouTube with instructions for baking kac kac, a type of Somali cookie. The film showed step-by-step

instructions with text in Somali, English and Arabic, accompanied by a Somali song. To the delight of the students, the film ended with views over the Olympic Stadium of Mogadishu.

To offer students model texts, cookery books in different languages were used, after which students wrote recipes in their strongest language. Most of the students carried out the main part of the writing at home and then continued by translating the recipe into Swedish in school with the help of the assistants. One student said that her mother had dictated the recipe in Somali to her. Another student chose to bake a cake at home, bringing it to school and inviting the other students to taste it. Through step-by-step instructions and with the support of different linguistic resources, the students managed to learn the formal school language and to write a working text. As the students' earlier skills varied a lot, the results also varied, and some students wrote only in their first language.



Picture 3. Example of an instructing text in Arabic and Swedish.

The different activities provided different types of opportunities for authentic interaction that involved different languages as well as different modalities: speech, print and picture, both movable and stationary. Students later used their skills to write instructional texts in their mainstream subject classrooms.

These two examples illustrate how the multilingual policy developed at the management level became visible at the practical level. Starting with students' prior knowledge and experiences, both language and skills created bridges between the two settings. By being invited to draw on that knowledge and those experiences, students were given the chance to show themselves to be competent students, while they were also given the opportunity to draw on their prior linguistic resources in the development of their spoken and written skills in Swedish.

## Discussion

The aim of this article was to analyse how policy at the management level was implemented through classroom practices. Through an ethnographic approach, material was created that showed how policies at different levels merge into each other, as maintained by Bonacina-Pugh (2012) and Hornberger and Johnson (2017). The duration of this collaboration over several years, where the action research covered the last four years, has made longer processes visible such as the change of local language policy and its relation to practices at the classroom level. In this case it became particularly clear that what happened at the management level, through the developmental work under the management of the headmaster and some dedicated teachers, resulted in changes at the practical level, where different multilingual teaching practices have been created. Furthermore, through interviews and observations it has also become clear that the level of perception of language policy is crucial to and inseparable from the other levels.

Earlier research on multilingual classroom practices has seldom been related to local school policy. Exceptions are Hélot (2014), Cummins (2000) and Cummins et al. (2015). In the developmental work that has been presented here, language policy at the local school level, including policy documents, together with the conscious raising of teacher competence regarding conditions for multilingual students' learning, including all staff and not only classroom teachers, stands out as important for the powerful school development that was the result. The solid developmental work carried out at the school over a long period, from the training of teachers in Swedish as a second language to the discussions among personnel, collective studies and teacher exchanges, laid a solid foundation for the development of language policy at different levels. Through the process students' linguistic resources became not only accepted but also in some cases recognised as resources. This language policy is visible at all levels: formulated in official documents, articulated in interviews and observed in different practices of both students and staff. Groups of personnel, such as mother tongue teachers, study guidance assistants and dinner-hall employees, probably did affect school practices, but research on this is limited here, despite the great importance they assumingly have in terms of the social aspects of schooling, particularly when it comes to identity development. The student who uses her first language for mental arithmetic in class is an example of how the multilingual norm becomes visible in a classroom where Swedish is dominant.

Cummins (2000) argues that the inclusion of students' varying linguistic resources in the classroom is necessary in terms of both recognising the diversity of identities they represent and enabling the development of their identity as competent students. The writing processes that students were involved in during these projects made visible the diversity – not only the linguistic aspects of diversity, but also the social, cultural and cognitive aspects. The inclusion of students' diverse linguistic backgrounds, as well as their earlier experiences, gave them opportunities to express and claim varied identities, including identities as competent individuals (Manyak, 2004). Examples of this are the newly arrived girl who could show herself to be a competent writer by displaying her Arabic competence and also the newly arrived students who got the opportunity to demonstrate their competence in different ways through the language workshop. This was particularly the case in the final stages of the writing process, when they read out their texts, bridging between the supportive environment in the workshop and the more challenging environment of the mainstream classroom. Taking into account that some of these students had no prior school experience and had not been able to read or write upon arrival at the school, this would appear to be particularly important.

The multilingual writing gave all students the opportunity to develop their writing skills drawing on their other linguistic resources. This is true of both the students who were

born in Sweden and who came from homes where Swedish was dominant, and the students who came from homes where other languages dominated. Switching between languages, translating and explaining, and using the tools that were available, such as digital tools for translation and dictionaries, while receiving support from multilingual staff, parents, siblings and other relatives and acquaintances, enabled the students to practise the skills that are necessary in a multilingual society.

The analysis of policy at different levels has made the relation between issues of power clear, issues such as what linguistic resources are made visible and given status. When it comes to questions of who is given voice, whose voice is heard and what competence is made visible and given value, the importance of work with language policy becomes clear based on these projects, as does the importance of including different categories of staff in these processes. Also, questions concerning the identity development of students – who you may be and who you may become – appear here to depend on language policy at the local school level.

This work was made possible thanks to the dedication of a number of teachers and the strong administrative support at the local school level and the municipality level, despite the challenge the project presented for all involved. Deciding on and promoting language policies that oppose hierarchies of power, such as in this case earlier monolingual norms that exclude students' diverse linguistic resources, are crucial for social change as they promote social equity and foster change. As argued by Hornberger & Johnson (2017), involvement with policy processes, in the way teachers, school administrators and other staff demonstrated in this case, may shift the boundaries for what is possible in education and may thus constitute a powerful tool in school development.



## **Acknowledgements**

We want to thank students, teachers and other staff who were involved in this work, including administrators at both the school and municipal levels who made this work possible. A particular thanks goes to Anita Isaksson and Kent Carlsson. We also want to send our warm thanks to teachers at Thornwood Public School, Mississauga, and at St Mary's CE Primary School, Manchester, and in particular to headmaster Roberto Di Prospero and headmistress Jenny McGarry, as well as to Zaiba Beg, for their inspiration and willingness to share their experiences, at both a personal and a professional level.

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