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To cite this article: Annika Åkerblom & Anne Harju (2019): The becoming of a Swedish preschool child? Migrant children and everyday nationalism, Children's Geographies, DOI: [10.1080/14733285.2019.1566517](https://doi.org/10.1080/14733285.2019.1566517)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14733285.2019.1566517>



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Published online: 11 Jan 2019.



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The becoming of a Swedish preschool child? Migrant children and everyday nationalism

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ABSTRACT

The article examines how migrant children in Sweden are fostered to become 'Swedish' in a preschool setting aiming to integrate them and their families into the Swedish society. The analysis, where Bernstein's (1971, 2000) concepts of classification, framing, and reconceptualization are used, shows how the children are fostered against a background of everyday nationalism, produced in preschool curriculum, recontextualized in the talk of the educators and reproduced in everyday routines in the preschool setting. The analysis also shows how 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.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 4 June 2018

Accepted 21 December 2018

KEYWORDS

Preschool; Everyday nationalism; Banal nationalism; Pedagogical discourse; Compensatory pedagogy

Introduction

In Sweden, as in the rest of Europe, there is a lively debate about the reception and education of migrant children (Nilsson and Bunar 2016; Nilsson Folke 2016), and opinions differ concerning how to educate and socialize young migrant children. In relation to this, the educational system in Sweden, and elsewhere, has been seen to have a double function. On the one hand, it is, and has historically been, viewed as a mediator of dominant culture, language, and imagined nationality, and on the other hand, in an increasingly globalized world, it is seen as a promoter of values like multiculturalism and tolerance (Hjerm 2001; Lappalainen 2006; Tobin 2013; Allemann-Ghionda 2015; Mavroudi and Holt 2015). As Mavroudi and Holt (2015) point out, as part of their democratic mission schools and preschools are often at the forefront in teaching children to be more accepting and tolerant of differences. However, at the same time they also remain key sites where national belonging and identity are taught. Both these aspects are at play in the Swedish preschool curriculum and practice. On the one hand, ideals of child-centredness related to aspects such as tolerance, equality, egalitarianism, democracy, and cooperative social relationships are emphasized (Einarsdottir et al. 2014). On the other hand, monolingualistic as well as monocultural norms prevail in settings aimed at educating the future citizens, and previous research has shown that these norms concern especially immigrant children (Johansson and Pramling Samuelsson 2006; Johansson 2012; Lunneblad 2013). In the paper, we explore how the tension between these different ideas is embedded in the preschool curriculum and how the ideas are interpreted and operationalized. We do that through the concept of banal and everyday nationalism, and look, therefore, specifically at how issues concerning

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language and culture are expressed in relation to the pedagogy formed around the migrant child. We consider preschool policy documents, educators' talk as they try to reinterpret the ideas, and everyday routines formed around migrant children. We ask the following questions: What are the explicit and implicit purposes of the preschool education for migrant children? Who is the migrant child to be educated and to what ends?

Banal nationalism and everyday nationalism

Competing ideas about preschool education are explored through the study of nationalism at a micro level, that is, the national as something embedded in everyday social routines and practices, in commonsense views about the world, and in signs and symbols (Billig 1995; Skey 2013; Antonsich and Matejskova 2015; Fox and van Ginderachter 2018). There is a growing body of research that studies nationalism as intersections of identity, national subject transformation, and spatial and temporal dimensions (Millei and Imre 2016), and this paper contributes to this field. One influential concept is Billig's (1995) notion of banal nationalism. He argues that national identities can be studied in embedded routines of social life and that they are maintained and reproduced through signs, symbols, and reference to the nation. This includes practices in educational institutions, where practitioners in their everyday practices mediate norms related to nationalism and national identity (Mavroudi and Holt 2015).

Another concept within the field is everyday nationalism. Even though both banal nationalism and everyday nationalism are located at a micro level, there are important distinctions between the two concepts. While banal nationalism concerns the implicit discursive forms that nationalism takes, where nations are seen as a taken-for-granted framework for making sense of the world, everyday nationalism is about 'ordinary people doing ordinary things', in other words, everyday practices. The former operates implicitly in everyday life through such elements as flags, media discourse, popular culture, music, architecture, and landscapes, and it explores the nation when and where it is unseen, unheard, and unnoticed. The latter is more explicit, and it explores the nation when and where it is seen, heard, and noticed, for example, in identity talk, food, language, consumption, and ritual practices (Fox and van Ginderachter 2018). In the paper, we draw on both concepts, as we are interested both in how individuals (re)produce the nation through everyday activities, and how the education system as a whole is defined in relation to national priorities and understandings of the world. As Hearn and Antonsich (2018) argue, there is a need to bridge the banal and everyday approaches in the study of nationalism. One way of doing this, according to the authors, is to study individual practices in relation to the social organizational context within which these practices take place. The concepts of banal nationalism and everyday nationalism can thus be used to understand the hierarchies between different kinds of educational content and the content that is prioritized for different groups of children in educational practice as well as in policy.

To understand the hierarchies and what is given priority in practice as well as in policy text, we have used Basil Bernstein's sociology of knowledge (Bernstein 1971, 1996/2000; Lundberg 2015) to examine the organizing principles in the preschool context studied. The term pedagogical discourse refers to Bernstein's concept for analysing the types of knowledge constructed through communication processes. The concepts of classification, framing, and reconceptualization are used. According to Bernstein (1971, 47), classification and framing are central to understanding regulation of educational knowledge, and the boundary strength of classification and framing reveals the distribution of power and principles of social control. *Classification* here is used to explore the way educational content (what is to be learned) is delimited, and the hierarchy between different kinds of content (Bernstein 1996/2000). *Framing* is used to explore who controls the learning practice, that is, the types of communication, sequencing, pace, and social order in the construction of knowledge. Strong framing occurs when it is clear who is controlling the learning practice, and weak framing when the control is less apparent. Bernstein's concepts classification and framing are used to analyse discourses in the preschool curriculum, in educators' talk, and in everyday

practice to reveal what content is given priority, and how everyday and banal nationalism operates in those contexts.

Preschool, migrant children, and their families

Previous research on preschool and migration shows that educational challenges related to the education of migrant children often have been explained as a problem of differences in culture, ethnicity, and language of the migrants (Bouakaz 2009; León Rosales 2010; Lunneblad 2013; Tobin 2013; Nilsson and Bunar 2016). What is viewed as a problem or problematic is often conceptualized as being situated within the children and the families, rather than as the effects of structural or other factors, and only on rare occasions is diversity presented as an asset. Swedish studies about preschool pedagogy in multiethnic groups reveal that in the case of Sweden, despite the efforts on policy level to create multicultural education, a monolingualistic as well as a monocultural norm prevails (Johansson and Pramling Samuelsson 2006; Johansson 2012; Lunneblad 2013). According to Lunneblad (2006), for example, diversity is made invisible, or spoken of as something in contrast to 'normal things' in everyday activities. Johansson (2012) found in her investigation about dominating cultures of learning in a preschool setting that the majority language and culture dominated. Differences in forms of traditions, ethnic backgrounds, and languages differing from the majority language were considered exotic and temporary elements, while Swedish and assumed Swedish traditions were considered normal. In another study described by Johansson and Pramling Samuelsson (2006), child–teacher dialogue in multiethnic groups was compared to child–teacher dialogue in groups where the children had Swedish as their first language. The dialogue was found to be correcting/compensatory in the multiethnic group in contrast to the other group, where the dialogue was found to be supportive rather than correcting. Since the Nordic countries share a similar preschool system and ideology (Einarsdottir et al. 2014), studies from other Nordic countries have been included in the overview. The patterns found in the child–teacher dialogue of the study by Johansson and Pramling Samuelsson (2006) were also found in a Danish study (Palludan 2007), where preschool teachers had a tendency to approach children with language backgrounds other than Danish differently than children who spoke the dominant language. The latter were provided with more opportunities to participate in dialogue with the teachers than were children with other ethnic/linguistic backgrounds. In another Danish study (Bundgaard and Gulløv 2006), the staff of preschool institutions tried to mute differences between children, informed by the idea that children are equal and that they should be treated as such. At the same time, they made educational efforts to compensate for upbringing in what were viewed as non-Danish traditions, by teaching the children to behave in a 'proper Danish' way, that is, a behaviour that would be appropriate for their future lives in Denmark. The conclusion was that two different pedagogical strategies coexisted in the practice, depending on whether the child was conceptualized as Danish or not.

The educational challenges that are viewed as a 'problem of difference' in relation to the migrant children (León Rosales 2010; Lunneblad 2013; Nilsson and Bunar 2016) also concern their families. Lunneblad (2017) shows in an ethnographic study how norms govern pedagogical strategies in the reception of refugee children and families in preschool. One strategy is aimed at fostering the parents to adjust to the routines and norms of the preschool, to become 'Swedish preschool parents'. A reoccurring theme in the study was that the parents were perceived to be lacking the Swedish norm of time management, which was explained as 'other cultures' having a different understanding of time (Lunneblad 2017). This can be considered an example of how nationalism operates to organize life in preschool institutions. Another study shows similar results regarding time management. In a Finnish study in preschool classes migrant parents were, as in the Swedish study, said to have a 'different understanding concerning time', and this served to explain why they had difficulties following the preschool timetable (Lappalainen 2006). The author claims that governance of time is an important part of Finnish national pedagogy, and in her study a national 'we' was constructed in relation to time. The study reveals that the liberal version of multiculturalism adopted in Finland strengthens

the boundaries of the nation state. This means that the dominant group can set the rules for participation of the minority groups (Lappalainen 2006).

The review of previous research indicates that the introduction of migrant children and their families causes challenges to the Swedish, as well other Nordic, preschool systems and that the 'problems' are attributed to the newcomers, often described as lacking something, being deficient and uninformed about explicit and implicit rules of daily life. This is in line with Antonsich and Matejskova's (2015) argument that efforts to treat diversity as a new governmental paradigm, for example, in educational curricula, continue to coexist with ideas about diversity associated with migration being problematic. If looking at nationalism as something embedded in everyday social routines, it seems, according to the previous studies presented here, that it is the preschool as a mediator of the dominant culture that has a superordinate role in the everyday practices.

The setting

The results from previous research are interesting to consider in relation to a study conducted in a preschool setting aiming to integrate migrant children and their families into Swedish society. The study was carried out, by the authors, in a preschool section in a medium-size city in the south of Sweden. The section receives children between three and five years old who do not speak Swedish, and it was selected with the aim of exploring conditions for preschool education for a group of newly arrived children.

The section was established in the 1990s as part of a conceived process of children arriving in Sweden, receiving support to promote integration, and moving on to regular preschool groups. The practice of separating children with the purpose of giving extra support in the Swedish language has a long history at the section. This practice differs from today's ordinary preschool education, where direct integration in general is more common. The pedagogical model used in the section also differs to some extent, which will be discussed further in the part 'Reproduction of nationalism in the daily activities of the preschool section'.

For the purpose of the present paper, examples drawn from the preschool curriculum and group interviews with staff and management have been used to identify and explore tensions and contradictions related to ideas about multiculturalism and the mediation of dominant culture, and how these are interconnected to nationalism at a micro level. In the interviews with the staff, they were asked about the daily practice with the children and how the educational content and activities were motivated. Bernsteinian tools of classification and framing were then used to analyse and identify what content was given priority and how, with the aim of uncovering implicit and explicit purposes of preschool education for migrant children.

The research has followed the adopted guidelines for research ethics used in the humanities and social sciences in Sweden (codex.vr.se). The participating educators were informed about the aim of the research, and that their participation was voluntary and could be cancelled whenever they wished. The preschool and the participating educators have also been anonymized to mask their identities. We want to emphasize that the extracts from the curriculum, previous research, and transcribed group interviews with educators are used as examples to illustrate relevant themes in relation to the aim of the paper. This means that they should be seen as illustrations of preschool practice in general in relation to social organizational structures (Skey 2013), and not specifically practices related to individuals in either the group interviews or the participating preschool.

Production of nationalism in a curriculum document

The function of the curriculum document could be seen as legitimizing pedagogical practice and producing symbolic representations of education. In the document, tensions like those identified in the previous research can be found regarding language, cultures, and the dual role of preschool. In the Swedish preschool curriculum document, 'children' are, on the one hand, described as competent

and having a right to be in charge of their own learning processes and agency, as in the following extract:

The preschool should contribute to children developing an understanding of themselves and their surrounding world. A sense of exploration, curiosity, and desire to learn should form the foundations for the preschool activities. These should be based on the child's experiences, interests, needs, and views. The flow of the child's thoughts and ideas should be used to create variety in learning. (Skolverket 2016, 9)

The rich and competent child described in the document should have 'real influence over working methods and contents of the preschool' (Skolverket 2016, 11), legitimizing a certain type of pedagogy and preschool activities in order to educate the child. This could be interpreted as a kind of national pedagogy of preschools in Sweden, which can be described as child-centred. But a possible tension is revealed, as it is at the same time up to the educators to distinguish the needs of the child and to act in what is perceived to be the best interest of the child, since 'Account should be taken of the varying conditions and needs of children' (5), pointing at a more compensatory approach for children living under conditions that are perceived as differing from those of the child in the first extract. Central to the national pedagogy is also the notion of *democracy*, not only as an aim of educating children to become democratic citizens but also as a means whereby children are seen as active participants able to influence and participate in the planning and evaluation of pedagogical practice (Einarsdottir et al. 2014; Skolverket 2016). In the preschool curriculum it is stated that:

An important task of the preschool is to impart and establish respect for human rights and the fundamental democratic values on which Swedish society is based. (Skolverket 2016, 3)

When the concept of classification (Bernstein 1996/2000) is used to discern the contents of words in the documents, by examining the boundaries with other contents, the notion of *fundamental democratic values* in the extract is classified as being closely connected to the *Swedish society* and about its foundation. The hierarchy of this goal in relation to other contents in the document can, from the position of this sequence at the beginning of the document, be interpreted as an overarching goal, connected to the role of preschool as a mediator of dominant cultural values, that is, to educate future Swedish citizens.

Other tensions are also visible in the document, for instance, regarding mobility, diversity, and multilingualism, which are presented as something that provides children with opportunities:

Increasing mobility across national borders creates cultural diversity in the preschool, which provides children with the opportunity to show respect and consideration for each individual irrespective of background (Skolverket 2016, 4)

However, when it comes to the aims and tasks of preschool education, the curriculum is marked by ambiguity, and it is not always clear what content is given priority. Interpreted on the basis of the position in the first part of the curriculum text, the preceding task of preschool education is to lay the foundations for lifelong learning, in an enjoyable way, for all children. When the concept of classification (Bernstein 1996/2000) is used to analyse the way the contents of the expressions are delimited, the notion of *all children* is classified with loose boundaries, which implies that there is no clear reference to who is included/excluded in this category:

The preschool should lay the foundations for lifelong learning. The preschool should be enjoyable, secure, and rich in learning for all children. (Skolverket 2016, 4)

However, on the next page of the curriculum, (other?) categories of children are differentiated and classified as children from *national minorities* and with a *foreign background*, as in this extract:

Awareness of their own cultural heritage and participating in the culture of others should contribute to children's ability to understand and empathise with the circumstances and values of others. The preschool can help to ensure that children from national minorities and children with a foreign background receive support in developing a multicultural sense of identity. (Skolverket 2016, 5)

Here, *own cultural heritage* and *culture of others* are classified as two different contents with strong boundaries and could be interpreted to mean that culture is an inborn property. The aim of cultural awareness is in the end to empathize with the circumstances and values of *others*, but it is not clear who ‘others’ in this sequence refers to. This points towards a conception of liberal multiculturalism (Lappalainen 2006) that refers to a social and mental construction where ‘the other’ is tolerated within the national space but where the dominant group still decides the scope of participation for the minority. One of the aims of preschool is, according to the curriculum, to support developing a sense of multicultural identity, both for children from national minorities and for children with foreign backgrounds (Skolverket 2016, 5). The way that categories of children are highlighted – from *national minorities* and with a *foreign background* – delimits the content of these categories as different from the notion of *all children* as the normal case. The preschool curriculum singles out children from national minorities and children with a foreign background, saying that those children should ‘receive support in developing a multicultural sense of identity’, but it does not mention the aim to support all children’s development of this kind of identity, pointing at possible tensions regarding how the preschool aims differ for various categories of children. This could be interpreted to mean that the educational aims are not the same for all children, since the educational goal is not to develop multicultural identities for all citizens, but only for children who are defined as the others, and that Swedish children are not supposed to develop this sense of identity.

Another tension examined in the preschool curriculum concerns language. The notion of *language* can be interpreted in many different ways. When it comes to children with a mother tongue other than Swedish, there is a dual ambition that those children should be given the opportunity to develop both the Swedish language and their mother tongue. But an analysis to distinguish how *language* as educational content is classified (Bernstein 1996/2000) shows that the aim is not clearly defined and is hard to separate from other educational contents:

Language and learning are inseparably linked together, as are language and the development of a personal identity. The preschool should put great emphasis on stimulating each child’s language development, and encourage and take advantage of the child’s curiosity and interest in the written language. Children with a foreign background who develop their mother tongue create better opportunities for learning Swedish, and developing their knowledge in other areas. The Education Act stipulates that the preschool should help to ensure that children with a mother tongue other than Swedish receive the opportunity to develop both their Swedish language and their mother tongue. (Skolverket 2016, 6)

Such contents are *learning* and *identity development*, and in the extract, it is clearly stated that it is not possible to separate them from *language*. The pedagogic method to stimulate language development is to *encourage* and *take advantage of the child’s curiosity and interest*, pointing to a pedagogic framing where it is not clear who is in control of the pedagogic activities or how they should be carried out. The notion of *mother tongue* is classified against *Swedish language* as a different content, and here the Swedish language stands out as the prioritized content because of its placement in the sentence. The content of *mother tongue* in relation to *Swedish language* is classified as content to give support for learning Swedish and to develop knowledge in other areas, which gives the mother tongue a subsidiary role. From the analysis it is implicated that fostering the majority language is the primary aim, and the child’s mother tongue rather a secondary aim.

Recontextualization of nationalism in talk about the daily activities of the section

When the curriculum text is interpreted by the educators and recontextualized in daily practice, the ambiguity identified in previous research regarding the aims of preschool education is also identified in the talk about the preschool section. The educators perceive themselves as promoters of multiculturalism. When asked to describe their work, they explain that it is important for them to have a comprehensive view regarding the children and their families and to be open to diversity. For example, one of the educators states that the work should be based on the needs of the families:

And we think that the parents and children should be part of it [preschool], that you proceed from their needs and work from there. All have the same value, regardless of belief, gender, nationality, and so forth. It is also really important, and then, identity, language, and learning go hand in hand. I think about the whole, not the details.

The educators' intentions are to be culturally sensitive and responsive, which is in line with how a multicultural approach can be understood (Hjerm 2001; Lappalainen 2006; Moran 2011; Tobin 2013). Their responsiveness is focused on a comprehensive approach regarding cultural, social, and religious values. This is practised by accommodating religious diets and by using words from children's home languages and books in the languages represented in the section. Objects and tokens from the children's home countries have been collected over the years and are kept in a cupboard. A wreath with many different flags is placed in one of the windows. But even though the cupboard with tokens has glass windows so that the children can see them from the outside, the cupboard is put on a shelf beyond their reach. It is taken down at the educators' initiative and used in circle time on special occasions. A closer look at the row of flags shows that about half of the flags are Swedish, and the rest are flags from other countries. An investigation of how those objects are framed in time and space shows that they are positioned in the margins, used only on special occasions. The way that the objects and tokens are positioned shows how banal nationalism works (Skey 2013), since it signals what is given priority. The tokens are not freely available to the children, implying that even though the objects are there, they are viewed as exceptions from the 'normal' activities of the preschool.

When it comes to the preschool activities, what are perceived as Swedish cultural traditions are given an emphasized role in everyday activities. As one of the educators explained, 'Our children do not know Santa Claus, Lucia, so we are currently working on this, showing pictures and songs, and then we have clothes for them to wear, because they have no idea about this.' In the quotation below, one of the educators speaks of the effort to introduce the children to the Lucia celebration, (a popular tradition celebrated before Christmas in most preschools in Sweden) by using the props and showing the rituals around it:

Last year ... we were going to show the children before Lucia what Lucia is, so we, the adults, dressed in Lucia clothes and all that, and went inside. The children lay on the floor and started laughing. We came in with candles in the hair and nightgowns. They just – 'Are you wearing a nightgown? Are we in the theatre? What is this?'

This could be interpreted as a way of initiating the children into something given priority, since the educators put much effort into it, and taken for granted, although the children did not seem to understand what it was about. Using Bernstein's concept of classification, the initiation into the Lucia tradition is strongly classified and delimited with strong boundaries, as there is no doubt as to the content of the activities. The way it is positioned as an educational content shows how everyday nationalism works in deciding what is given priority and what signals the children are given about what is viewed as valuable.

In a discussion about their work, the educators reflected on the fact that they celebrate a number of Swedish traditional festivals, but only one that is considered a non-Swedish tradition (Ramadan). In an attempt to be more responsive, they expressed a wish to become attentive also to traditions from the home countries of the families. However, the idea of structuring the yearly cycle of the preschool section through celebrations is not questioned, a strategy that could actually be connected to a national idea of time management. Organizing everyday life in preschool based on seasonal celebrations can be seen as a framework for the construction of Swedishness (cf. Lappalainen [2006] for the Finnish context). The ritual celebrations, central to preschool education in Sweden, can be interpreted as part of the nation-building project and the construction of a common 'we', where 'Swedish' children are supposed to bring into the preschool experiences of those rituals. Since the children of the section lack those experiences, as the example shows, it does not make sense to them; they are treated as lacking the right national experiences. The framing of the pedagogic situation is compensatory and strongly framed; since the children are positioned as lacking important experiences, the educators know what is best for them and take charge of the educational situation. The way that the

activities are carried out shows how everyday nationalism operates to position the children – as not yet Swedes – and the position of the objects in the margins shows that even though the educators strive to be culturally sensitive, the role of the preschool given priority is that of a transmitter of Swedish culture.

One of the managers expresses that it is their responsibility to let the parents know about the common values on which the Swedish preschool institution is based:

We have gender equality work, we have democracy work, and we have a common basis for values that the institution is founded on.

So the multicultural approach expressed by one of the educators actually clashes with the notion that there are values that are not subject to negotiation, for example, democracy and gender equality, as the manager points out, stating that the staff might actually have to fight for it, but that the curriculum document is clear on this point:

When you, as staff, might have to take on rather a lot fights and be very clear with the fact that we work according to the Swedish curriculum, which is clear. Having put your child here, we don't negotiate about that. We can explain, but it is not negotiable. It is not that we can be half-democratic, which might be difficult for the staff.

This implies that although there might be different interpretations of democracy, it is the specific Swedish commonly agreed notion (as it is expressed in the curriculum document) that is given priority, and that interpretation is not a topic for discussions or negotiation by the immigrant parents.

The areas of tension regarding the pedagogues, on one hand, as promoters of multiculturalism, and on the other, as mediators of the dominant culture, are not unique to the section where the examples come from. This ambiguity has also been highlighted in previous research. Tobin (2013), for example, found that early childhood educators in the United States who work with migrant children often find themselves caught between two core beliefs; the first is a belief in being culturally responsive, and the second, a belief in remaining faithful to core professional practices. He found that, like the pedagogues in our study, the educators' willingness to be culturally responsive was subordinated to their commitment to work according to the U.S. preschool tradition.

The question of language

Another area of tension identified in talk about the preschool section concerns language, which is also a dominating theme in previous research (Johansson and Pramling Samuelsson 2006; Björk-Willén 2008; Johansson 2012; Kultti 2012; Lunneblad 2013) and the debate about migrant children and preschool in the Swedish context. According to Tobin (2013), language and language policy are among the most heated debates in relation to migration and early education internationally. The question is whether education should focus on the majority language or foster multilingualism (or bilingual education). Previous research in the Swedish context shows that the Swedish language is considered the norm, and other languages are seen as deviations (Johansson 2012). The pedagogues at the section find themselves in the middle of this debate, a tension that also shows in the preschool curriculum, where the dual ambition is that children with a mother tongue other than Swedish should have the opportunity to develop both the Swedish language and their mother tongue (pointing at the implicit idea that there can just be one mother tongue).

The educators express the ambition to both support the mother tongue and teach Swedish, but speak in different manners about how to accomplish the two tasks. When describing how Swedish is taught, the account is detailed and includes specific methods, like employing language bags/kits, reading books, and so forth, and working with 'language development with children in small groups'. The work is described as intensive, and the educators observe and reflect on the progress in Swedish-language development of the children. At the same time, both management and the educators highlight that the mother tongues of the children are important and should be encouraged. However, when the mother tongue is addressed, it is often in relation to identity and support, but not in specific

terms. With Bernstein's concept of classification, Swedish language as content is delimited with strong boundaries and is clearly defined, while support for the mother tongue is vaguely classified with loose boundaries against *identity*. The educational setting for the teaching of the Swedish language is described as strongly framed, and the pedagogical modality is visible pedagogy (Bernstein 1996/2000), where the educators are in control of communication, sequencing, and pace. When language (Swedish) and language proficiency are addressed by educators and management, it is in terms of problems. The lack of Swedish language is considered a problem for the children (and parents). The children are said to 'lack a language', or 'have language problems' or deficit language. The quotation below by one of the educators illustrates this tension, as *language* is spoken of as an obstacle for children in making themselves understood:

Therefore, an obstacle is always language. If the children can't make themselves understood through language, it is not always easy before they find other ways.

To not be able to make oneself understood is viewed as a problem residing in the child and not in the one who is not able to understand. An analysis of how the concept of *language* is classified shows that it is not used in a general sense as in the example from the curriculum, but instead denotes *Swedish language*. Not being able to speak Swedish is an obstacle and a problem, and the notion *problem* is classified as a property of the children. The opposite also applies: while not speaking Swedish is described as a problem, being able to speak Swedish is described by the educator as advancing developmentally – something positive – which this example illustrates:

Then you notice after three to four months ... The majority language is, for instance, Arabic right now, but in January it is Swedish. Then you see how far they have come in their development, and that's a real joy. It is fantastic.

Here the notion of *development* refers to proficiency in speaking Swedish, which as educational content is classified in opposition to *speaking Arabic*. Speaking Swedish (while playing) is positioned as desirable, and thus, in this example, given superiority over speaking other languages. What the examples suggest and the analysis shows, is a focus on the majority language, which is given a superior role in relation to supporting multilingualism.

Reproduction of everyday nationalism in the daily activities of the preschool section

The educational content that is given priority is shown in the pedagogic discourse created around the migrant child. Between the tasks of stimulating children's development and learning, and offering secure care, the care is given priority in the pedagogy of the section. This instructional discourse is also found in previous research in multiethnic educational settings (Nilsson and Bunar 2016; Lunneblad 2017), based on the construction of migrant children as vulnerable and in need of security, which informs the pedagogic strategies used with the children, as exemplified by a comment of one of the educators in this study:

Like this section, since it is really structured here ... and the base for doing that is that they get safety; that they know exactly what will happen during the day. Because they don't know the language, you cannot explain to them ... So that they fall into a pattern ... which might seem, or sound, rather boring, but, well, those children need it. It might be the only safe spot for them, as they have been through a lot, and still are [going through a lot] ... at home, one could say.

A theme that often occurs in the interviews with staff and management concerns the unclear aims of the section, and there is a tension between whether the primary aim concerns language support or introduction to the Swedish school system. However, at the same time as the overall aim of the section is marked by weak classification and framing, making the pedagogy invisible (Bernstein 1996/2000), the pedagogical discourse that characterizes the daily activities of the section is more explicit.

To meet the needs of children who are perceived as having all the same needs and being traumatized, even though there are also children whose parents are economic immigrants, a pedagogical approach adapted for refugee children is used. The approach includes fixed routines, teacher-led activities with strong control of time and space. The aim is to create order, routines, and security, and it is motivated by the statement that ‘Fixed routines that create continuity in children’s lives create security.’ The children also receive support to learn how to play, since they are said to have ‘lost their natural ability to play’. The pedagogical modality is visible pedagogy marked by strong framing (Bernstein 1996/2000), and it is the educators who are in control of communication (teacher initiated), sequencing, and pace (what is to be done and in what order), and of space and time.

The content of the learning is more loosely classified, with the focus on social development and language. When the predominant aim of the pedagogic organization is to create safety, the possibilities for children’s agency of time and space, viewed as central in the Swedish preschool curriculum, are diminished. So here the educators instead rest on the task of knowing what is best for the children, and that is to be ‘safe’, an idea that could be connected to the conception of the nation as a source of comfort and security (Skey 2013). Although they know that too much control is not good, it is in this case considered justified.

The same kind of theme was identified in other national settings (e.g. Rutter 2006; Tobin 2013). Rutter (2006), for example, discusses the dominating ‘trauma-discourse’ in relation to refugee children in the United Kingdom, and claims that this discourse tends to homogenize refugee children as weak and vulnerable. She points to the danger of assuming that all refugee children have the same needs and that they above all need therapy to recover from trauma.

The kind of pedagogy used in the setting is characterized by compensatory pedagogy (Sleeter 2007), which is a strategy used to manage social and cultural diversity by providing extra resources or special treatment for groups or categories of children conceptualized as lacking something or having special needs. Möller (2012) highlights that compensatory strategies build on a deficit perspective of the child, and the deficit perspective focuses on transforming the individual child rather than creating a more equal system. Bernstein (1971) was critical towards compensatory education because of its failure to provide adequate learning and instruction for working-class children. In relation to the migrant children of the section, who were seen as lacking the right kind of national cultural capital (Skey 2013), and with those principles applied to the children of the present case – everyday nationalism and conception of the children who are to be educated and fostered – preschool education does not first of all provide child-centred learning aiming at freedom and agency, but a pedagogy aiming at fostering the national cultural capital.

Discussion

The aim of this paper has been to explore the contradictions expressed in ideas and practices concerning migrant children and their families in the Swedish preschool, and how everyday and banal nationalism operate and are produced within this space. The analysis shows that the image of a rich and competent child brought forward in the Swedish preschool curriculum clashes with the idea that the varying needs and conditions of children should be taken into account and inform the pedagogical strategies. What this actually means is that the children in Swedish preschools are categorized into two different but unified groups, receiving different kinds of pedagogies. The pedagogy aiming at freedom and agency, which could be described as the national pedagogy, is reserved for children who already have the right kind of national identity and language, the Swedish preschool child. The ‘other’ child receives another kind of pedagogy, a controlled pedagogy aiming to compensate for something perceived as missing, the ‘right’ kind of national capital.

This was something that Sriprakash (2009) also showed in an Indian rural context. When teachers were to reinterpret a child-centred pedagogic approach, the underlying assumptions actually legitimized strong control of some pupils who were positioned as deficit, which is also the case in our study. In the present study, the children were instructed with the implicit assumption that they

need safety and that safety is given by structure. And although the educators were aware that too much structure and control is not in accordance with the intentions in the preschool policy document, they found it justified in this case, with the argument of best practice. Since the children of the section were viewed as lacking something, they received compensatory education, rather than the national education aimed at supporting agency. The assumption that children comprise different groups with different needs is difficult to detect without a closer analysis, since it is to a large extent implicit.

The analysis of the educational content and what contents are given priority in the practice shows that Swedish cultural traditions and a focus on the majority language are given an emphasized role, while other contents, such as support for the child's mother tongue, are given a more secondary position. This could be interpreted to mean that for categories of children seen as deviating from the norm, the aims and tasks of preschool education differ from the norm of educating the 'Swedish preschool child'.

The analysis of the areas of tension regarding the explicit and implicit purpose of the preschool education, that is, what content is given priority in the pedagogic discourse and in the talk about the preschool section, shows how everyday and banal nationalism operate in preschool education for migrant children, where preschool education mediates the dominant culture and majority language. Although a multicultural approach was highlighted by both the management and pedagogues, the analysis shows that dominant cultural traditions and the Swedish language are emphasized. The purpose of the education seems to differ, depending on who is to be educated and why. Interpreting through the lens of everyday and banal nationalism what content was valued and given priority in talk and instructional discourse, it emerges that the children of the section are being compensated for lack of assumed national identity. Consequently, they and their families are positioned in the margins and encouraged to adjust to a given standard. An interpretation of this is that the aim here is not to create a new idea of the nation as a multicultural one where every citizen is a multicultural citizen. Rather, it is only those 'others' who have this identity, the aim in this case to create not a multicultural society, but rather a Swedish nation where the other is tolerated within the national space, but never as a part of it.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

This work was supported by The Swedish Institute for Educational Research.

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