Factors facilitating and obstructing a school development project

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ABSTRACT
This study describes and critically discusses a development project designed to create and enact a local language policy at a Swedish multilingual school, its context, content and implementation dimensions. The collaborative construction of a school language policy is a complex process, with tensions that need to be resolved. By describing the processes involved in the language policy project we examine the factors that facilitated and obstructed the enactment of the language policy. The data include 25 interviews with school headteachers and staff members, 15 observations of teachers and school-age educare teachers, field notes, and audio recordings of research circles. Drawing on insights from the enactment framework, the analysis reveals three important themes with respect to the enactment processes: continuity, cohesion, and inclusion. Factors such as communication and leadership, but also external factors, were found to influence outcomes of the project, illuminating an interwoven web of contexts and facets for understanding the enactment of the language policy. These factors influencing outcomes of the project will be discussed in the light of implications for the enactment of the school language policy project.

Introduction

Numerous Swedish school development projects, both community- and state-financed, have come and gone from the mid-20th century onward (Löfqvist, 2015). Scholarly literature has shown that the construction of school development is a complex process, creating tensions to be resolved to achieve sustainable changes (Berg et al., 2015; Löfqvist, 2015; Thelin, 2013). This article is an empirically grounded contribution to these discussions of how to facilitate sustainable school development. The overall purpose is to contribute to a better understanding of how processes of a school development project are enacted at the local level. Thus, we examine the question of what factors either facilitate or obstruct the enactment of a school development project.

We present a study that describes and critically discusses a development project designed to create and enact a local language policy at a Swedish multilingual school (hereafter referred to as the Language Policy Project [LPP]), its context, content and implementation dimensions. More specifically, collaborative learning among teachers...
and school-age educare personnel was set out to improve literacy practices. All professional categories at the school (including school librarians, school-age educare teachers, and mother-tongue teachers) were involved, with the headteacher as the leader in charge of the processes.

**Background**

To contextualise the LPP development process, we briefly describe historical influences on Swedish schools. The late 1980s saw a substantial change in governance in Sweden, and steps were taken towards an increasingly decentralised, liberalised, and privatised society. This transformation towards a managerial discourse about control, the so-called New Public Management (NPM), has affected the public sector and the educational system (Ball, 2007; Lundahl, Erixsson-Arreman, Holm, & Lundström, 2013). One effect is a school system with increased external control, such as national inspections and assessments and a goal- and result-oriented curriculum (Imsen, Blossing, & Moos, 2017). Another effect is extensive school reforms, (Dovemark & Erixon-Arreman, 2017; Lundström, Holm, & Erixon Arreman, 2017), often followed by different national and local school projects (Löfqvist, 2015). Since the early nineties the local municipalities, together with school headteachers, have had the autonomy to interpret and translate national policies in relation to their own priorities. Performance management and decentralisation were also followed by the introduction of free school choice, as competition aimed to improve quality. Consequently, school headteachers are responsible for combining national and municipal school policies with market goals (Hult, Lundström, & Edström, 2016), even though these responsibilities often come into conflict (Lundström et al., 2017). In addition, the implementation of an individual performance-related salary system (Hult et al., 2016) has affected the schools by increased mobility among teachers, who often follow high-achieving pupils (Bunar, 2011). Headteachers also have the responsibility to carry out school development according to the Swedish Education Act (SFS, 2010, p. 800); however, according to a national report (SOU, 2015, p. 22), their administrative work limits the time they are able to spend on school development.

Another important contextual influence is the noticeable increase of second-language pupils, (Bunar, 2017). This factor has imposed new demands on the receiving schools, as language acquisition is often a significant barrier for second-language pupils to succeed in school (Cummins, 2000; Obondo, Lahdenperä, & Sandevärn, 2016). Furthermore, schools often experience a shortage of personnel able to support pupils’ learning in their mother tongue (Bunar, 2017), and support from headteachers as well as municipalities is often lacking (Wozniczka & Rosvall, 2019). Not only is the promotion of intrinsic reading motivation an important challenge for the teachers (Economou, 2015), but also developing disciplinary literacies in all subjects becomes central (Petersson & Norén, 2017). School libraries, as part of a school’s educational activities, are important for pupils’ school performance (Gärdén, 2017); however, according to the Swedish School Inspectorate (2018), headteachers seldom support collaboration between teachers and school libraries.
Earlier research on school development in Sweden

During the last few decades, the main focus in Swedish school development research has shifted from school effectiveness research (e.g. questions on best practices for school success; Groth, 2010) or school development research (e.g. questions on organisational perspective; Höög, 2011) to what is described as a new school development paradigm (Löfqvist, 2015; Thelin, 2013). This paradigm has increased the focus on the interaction between all the actors in the pupils’ learning environment and on the importance of a bottom-up perspective in which changes are grounded in everyday practices (Scherp, 2013). Such research underlines that school development must be based on a school’s needs, culture, and local context (Berg et al., 2015; Löfqvist, 2015; Scherp, 2013).

In school development projects, many factors related to structure, culture, and actors have a bearing on whether projects lead to sustainable development (Löfqvist, 2015). Löfqvist (2015) highlighted the difficulty in succeeding with planned visions, saying, “Goals formulated in a project application, before a school project, likely [do] not yield the corresponding sustainable changes in the organizations’ preschools and schools” (pp. 128–129). To reach a comprehensive understanding of local school policy enactment, Adolfsson and Alvunger (2020) showed that all organisational levels as well as the actors and their relationships must be considered.

Closely related to the research area of school development is the field of school policy implementation, wherein both top-down and bottom-up perspectives have been criticised for their limited explanatory ability concerning how policy leads to failure or sustainable development (Khan, 2016). To overcome policy failure, Khan (2016) suggested key strategies. Essential to them is that all actors should be involved and feel engaged; and that an active leadership should exist that, for example, takes measures to guard against conflicts, fractions, and divisions in order to reach successive policy implementation.

The enactment perspective

The enactment perspective, with its connections to theories about implementation, offers a toolkit for analysing and interpreting how ideas in a policy encounter the school practice. It is important to go beyond implementation in a single direction from “bottom-up” or “top-down” as different contexts affect the processes of enactment in different ways (Ball, 2006; Lager, 2015; Ozga, 2000). According to Braun, Ball, Maguire, and Hoskins (2011), the enactment perspective brings together and pays respect to contextual, historic and psychosocial dynamics, highlighting their relation to the imperatives in policy texts aimed at producing the actions and activities that constitute policy, thus becoming something more than implementation. Ball, Maguire, and Braun (2012) also claim that policy enactments interweave three constituent facets: material (or contextual), interpretive, and discursive facets. None of these three facets alone can describe policy processes fully and sufficiently, but each can make important contributions to the understanding of the processes. According to Jarl and Rönnberg (2015), many competing demands are involved in contextualised practices and call for priority. In addition, limitations of available resources influence the choices made in the practice and thus how a policy is enacted. Different kinds of policies provide more or less space
for imaginative responses, although some are exhortative or developmental and others more imperative or disciplinary (Maguire, Braun, & Ball, 2015). Even though context always precedes policy, policy has effects on that context, thus creating new context (Ball et al., 2012).

Therefore, this study, based on a more exhortative or developmental language policy, focuses on how school cultures and different organisational contexts affect the creation and enactment of a language policy. The interacting contextual dimensions (the material facets) that we examine are those identified by Braun et al. (2011): professional cultures and situated, material, and external contexts. A situated context is, for example, the physical location of a school; the professional culture concerns different value systems among different professional categories. Economic and local conditions exemplify material contexts, and external contexts focus on societal demands. The different aspects of contexts for enactment provide the framework for the analysis of the project’s development.

We also pay attention to the interactions and linkages between different actors in the school system, such as schoolteachers, headteachers, mother-tongue teachers, and school-age educare personnel. i.e. all actors who conduct as much as follow policy (Ozga, 2000). In order to describe and critically discuss a development project designed to create and enact a local language policy at a Swedish multilingual school, its context, content and implementation dimensions, the following research questions were formulated:

Which factors facilitate the enactment of a school development project?

Which factors obstruct the enactment of a school development project?

Method and data

As part of a larger ethnographic study exploring the teaching of literacy and language, this article uses empirical data concerning the enactment of the LPP school development project. We use the inductive approach of thematic analysis to make visible the factors that either facilitated or obstructed the enactment of this school development project.

Before describing the participants, data collection, and our method of analysis for this study, we present contextual dimensions related to the LPP.

The language policy project

The LPP was a school development project planned and conducted in response to a Swedish primary school’s request to work with systematic language development upheld by both literacy research and practice. Launched by the former headteacher, the project was introduced to the current headteacher and staff and lasted for three years (2016–2018).

With the aim to create a coherent vision of literacy and language development and improve pupils’ achievement levels, the LPP came to involve two mutually
interdependent processes in all units of the school: (a) the development of more effective practices in the teaching of language and literacy, and (b) the construction of a language policy document involving guidelines for literacy work. Thus, language and literacy development became the focus across the curriculum and in all units of the school (i.e. in grades 1–5, the preschool class, and the school-age educare department).

The LPP was constructed around a cyclic participatory research design (Cain, 2011) grounded in the belief that school-based research should be carried out with – not in or on – schools. The participatory approach involved a partnership between researchers and practitioners in long-term, recurring research circles, wherein problems of literacy practice were identified and discussed and different ways forward were planned and evaluated (Bergman, 2014; Coburn, Pennel, & Geil, 2013). The research circles comprised all work teams at the school; all teachers and school-age educare staff were involved in the research circles from the beginning till the end of the project. Furthermore, pupil assistants, mother-tongue teachers, bilingual study counsellors, and librarians were involved when possible. The researchers specifically supported the personnel’s decisions with updated research findings and theoretical perspectives, whereas the personnel implemented the collaboratively planned interventions. Furthermore, the school headteacher’s responsibility was to construct and implement a language policy document in collaboration with the staff and researchers.

The school we studied had about 330 pupils in 2016, and around 30 spoken mother tongues, of which Swedish, Arabic, Somali, and Kurdish represented the most widely used languages. The school staff was comprised of 37 people of related occupations: preschool and school teachers, school-age educare teachers, teacher’s assistants (including bilingual pupil assistants), mother-tongue teachers, librarians, and special education teachers.

The school staff members were affiliated with the day-to-day school activities, but came from three separate units of the municipality with three leadership organisations. The school headteacher was the head of the classroom, educare, preschool, and special education teachers, and had overall responsibility for the day-to-day school activities. The mother-tongue teachers, who taught the pupils their several primary languages and also taught other subjects in their mother tongues, did not report to the school headteacher, though. They belonged to the Competence Centre for Multilingualism and were thus directed by another head. These mother-tongue teachers taught at many different schools, and the mother-tongue classes were held after the pupils’ mandatory school day. All mother-tongue teachers were asked to join the research circle, but many were hindered by their different schedules and meeting times.

Like the mother-tongue teachers, the two school librarians had a director outside of the school organisation. They worked part-time as municipal librarians and part-time as school librarians, but their employer was the public library.

The school was located in a fairly new building. There was nevertheless a lack of appropriate rooms for the daily activities. The preschool class, for example, was located in a provisory building 400 m away from the school during the first year of the study. During the third year of the study, grades 4 and 5 and the preparatory class moved to a building separate from the school. Besides the school, the building housed a public library, which also functioned as the school library.
Participants

Data were collected from the school headteacher and the teachers, school-age educare teachers, teacher assistants, mother-tongue teachers, and librarians. A total of 30 participants from the school volunteered to participate in the study. However, at the start of the second and third year, eighteen of the staff members, both teachers and school-age educare personnel, left the school for new positions. Fourteen of the staff members left during the second year. The new staff were introduced to the study and asked to make an informed and voluntary decision to participate in the study. The number of participants stayed at 30 individuals throughout the project, of whom twelve remained throughout the whole project.

Data collection

Data for this study were comprised of interviews, field notes of classroom observations, and reflective notes and audio recordings from research circles. Data were collected from January 2016 to May 2018.

We conducted eight focus group interviews (see Kruger & Casey, 2000) with staff members during the first three months of the project to understand their perceptions, experiences and views concerning language and literacy learning, as well as their positions towards a systematic implementation of language development across the school. Each focus group involved four to six staff members who worked with the same pupils. To gain a more in-depth understanding and collect individual perceptions, experiences and views concerning language and literacy learning and the enactment of the LPP, an additional seventeen individual interviews were conducted with school headteachers and twelve staff members that participated throughout the entire project. Recurring questions focused on conditions for and perceptions of potential changes. With the ambition to capture different aspects over time, eight interviews were conducted during the second year of the project and nine during the third year with more focus on outcomes. Both focus group and individual interviews were conducted in school facilities and lasted from 45 to 90 min. We guided the interviews conducted in a semistructured fashion (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014), and made audio recordings of them.

Fifteen observations were conducted where the researchers were invited by the teachers as an outcome of the discussions at the research circles: five observations in three (out of four) school-age educare departments and ten observations in seven (out of nine) classrooms of school years 1–5 during the last one-and-a-half years of the project. As observers, we had limited interaction with the participants while taking field notes on language and literacy practices. The aim was to explore how the LPP was enacted by local actors in educational practices by documenting the interactions between teachers and policy (i.e. human but also discursive and sociomaterial elements). Observations lasted about 1 h and were followed up by individual semistructured interviews with the observed teachers or school-age educare teachers (see Hammar Chiriac & Einarsson, 2013; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014). In addition, 26 research circle sessions were documented using field notes, which also served as data to understand what factors facilitated or obstructed the enactment of the LPP.
Data sources are referred to in the results section as individual interviews (ind. int.1–17), group interviews (gr.int.1–8) and observations (obs.1–15). All interviews and observations are chronologically numbered.

The research plan for the study was approved by the university’s ethical board, and adequate measures were taken to obtain all participants’ informed consent and ensure confidentiality. All participants were informed orally and in writing and gave their written consent to participate in the study. This was a continuous process as new personnel were employed throughout the project which prolonged the time of data collection. The fieldnotes of observations were presented to the observed teachers to obtain their approval.

**Qualitative thematic analysis**

The search for patterns in the data corpus employed thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In the data corpus of focus group and individual interviews, fieldnotes from observations and reflective notes from research circles contribute to the analysis; however, for this paper we draw primarily on the analysis of interviews, and we use the other forms of data as supporting material to interpret and better understand the interviewees’ positions and the context of the research. The analysis was made in six phases not only to grasp palpable and concealed meaning – in part and in whole – and contextualise the content, but also to “[reduce] data from an inchoate corpus to a systematically organized set from which a subset can document representative trends” (Smagorinsky, 2008, p. 397).

A recursive analysis process took place between an immanent reading of the material and a more structured way to identify patterns and themes in the data. The first four of the six phases comprised a purely inductive process. In the first phase, we familiarised ourselves with the data, and the interviews and audio recordings were transcribed. In the second phase, we generated initial codes and identified potentially interesting patterns. One example will be described and serves to illustrate the process of analysis. The following statement was identified during a focus group interview, *It feels like getting a new pupil to the classroom* when talking about the presence of bilingual teacher-assistants in the classroom. It was one of several indications of tensions between professional categories. We did not use specialised software; instead, we designed customised forms and tables with word processing software.

In the third phase, we collaboratively sorted the list of codes into broader potential themes and subthemes related to each data collection method; that is, we discussed the initial codes and differences of interpretation until we agreed on which themes and subthemes should be applied – a process that at times involved going back to the transcriptions. To exemplify, *distrust* and *extra workload* evolved as subthemes to the theme of *tension between professional categories*. Data from the various methods were thus condensed at a slightly higher level of abstraction, illustrating an inductive thematic development.

After reviewing the data in each method, we turned to the whole data corpus in phase 4. We denoted candidate themes through joint discussions and tested the validity of the themes in relation to the data set as a whole. The statement described above linked to fieldnotes identifying tension between different professional categories located
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In phase 5, we condensed the candidate themes to three major themes: 1) continuity or lack of continuity, 2) cohesion or lack of cohesion, and 3) inclusion or lack of inclusion. The examples described were thus condensed to the theme of lack of inclusion. Due to our goal to describe the factors that obstructed or facilitated the enactment of a school development project we linked these themes to the concepts professional cultures and situated, material, and external contexts from the enactment perspective (Ball et al., 2012). The two examples described related to tensions between professional categories could thus be linked to the concept of professional culture.

When the thematic analysis had come to an end, a sixth phase followed wherein the analysis was written up and the findings were linked to the material facet of the enactment perspective with the concepts of professional culture, situated context, material context, and external context (Ball et al., 2012). We presented our results at conferences to enable integration of suggestions made by attendees. Accordingly, the various steps of analysis embraced processes of rethinking, refining, expanding, or rejecting codes and may be described as a flexible process that went on for more than a year. During this process, we held collaborative discussions involving all authors (see Braun & Clarke, 2006; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

Results and analysis

We initially describe facilitating factors of the enactment of the LPP and then we present obstructing factors. Facilitating factors were, however, only identified in limited groups and do not represent the whole school.

Facilitating factors

Continuity

In this study, continuity primarily describes stability in time, indicating that development work was continuous over longer periods of time, in particular regarding continuity in the literacy practices. The term also refers to continuity in the work team, regarding the participation of the same members over longer periods of time. Continuity stands out as a facilitating factor for the development work.

Having the same core participants year after year characterised the teams that experienced development of their work in line with the LPP, and their members expressed positive responses to the input of the research circles. One teacher described the multilingual approaches as “an eye opener” (gr. int.6). The participants in the research circles shared thoughts, tried out ideas in their practice, returned to the research circle to discuss their experiences, and thus developed a pattern for how the ongoing work would lead them in the right direction.

Continuity in work teams also facilitated continuity in the literacy practices. Two school-age educare teachers declared, “Our time for planning is at the same time, so we can talk to each other and solve much … that other units can’t” (gr. int.5). One important aspect of this continuity in literacy practices was that regular read-alouds
escalated the pupils’ interest in reading or listening to stories. Thus, continuity was important not only for the teachers but also for the pupils, as they were given time and experiences that created positive expectations connected to read-alouds and other literacy events. Concerning the established routine of reading one school-age educare teacher commented “the pupils developed expectations that we should read once a day, protesting if we did not” (ind. int.15).

Another dimension of how continuity advanced the intentions of the LPP was the organisation of routines between a librarian, pupils, and the class teacher. In our observations we documented how regular visits to the library accustomed the pupils to how things worked there; they listened to book talks given by the librarian, at times together with a teacher who read the story in the pupils’ mother tongue in parallel with the librarian. Afterwards, they used their library cards to borrow books.

Work with pupils’ mathematical notions offers yet another aspect of how continuity established development. Based on teachers’ observations of the confusion that some rather basic notions created during lessons on mathematics concepts such as “double/half” and “prior to/after” were practised in both the classroom and in the school-age educare practice (i.e. in practical situations such as lining up, measuring ingredients, and so forth). These notions were dealt with for consecutive semesters to consolidate an understanding of the concepts among the pupils (obs.11; gr.int.4).

An important effect of continuity was the creation of optimal conditions for communication – between both pupils and involved personnel – via aspects such as security and familiarity with each other and with each other’s expectations.

In analysing the data we found continuity embedded pupils’ familiarity with expectations, habitual routines in activities for both teachers and pupils and, besides good conditions for communication among teachers, all dimensions of the concept of continuity as referred to above.

**Cohesion**

Cohesion here leaned heavily on personnel sharing the same space (i.e. the same workrooms). Aspects of communication embracing understanding each other, sharing the same views and points of departure, and letting the pupils meet using similar instructions and approaches were heavily dependent on space for communication. Cohesion also refers to the transfer of teaching content from school to school-age educare. One school-age educare teacher described a change in premises, stating, “We sit in the same room now; everyone is here . . . I experience a mutual respect that wasn’t there before” (ind. int.15), thus putting the relationship between communication, space and cohesion into words. Above all, cohesion means a shared professional culture, which pupils also encountered.

Continuity among staff created conditions for cohesion when the same individuals were involved in research circles and practice. Thus, the material context played an important role when the same teachers shared the same premises. When different professional categories were able to join the same research circles and meet the same pupils, conditions for transferring themes from school to school-age educare teachers improved considerably, even if we observed that the effects were limited.

Cohesion characterised literacy practices as teachers shared aims, routines, and views of literacy development. Some teachers also attended courses about the language
learning of immigrants. These teachers became pilots in spreading their approaches, and colleagues and researchers were able to affirm successful language development (obs.14). In this case, shared attitudes towards multilingualism proved crucial. This indicated coherent aims with the LPP illustrating the discursive facet of the policy’s enactment, which views multilingualism, multilingual pupils, and bilingual teachers as resourceful. Below, one aspect of enactment follows, where intercultural pedagogy was practised.

In one work team, our observations documented how the teachers developed word lists with central concepts for the understanding of the content or theme – the Water Cycle – on the whiteboard, with all languages in the classroom represented. This habit spread through discussions in the research circle, and the teachers developed this support step by step together with their pupils. The school-age educare teachers from the same research circle picked up the idea, illustrating how continuous contact between personnel helped spread good practices. This was not least because of the joint professional culture that developed with a common vision of the aims staff were working towards. One teacher described this, saying, “We know each other so well, we share the same aims” (ind.int.13). We were thus able to document a connection between continuity and cohesion in the teachers’ approach to creating literacy practices. Communication again stood out as a central aspect of the joint development work characterising the observed cohesion in some work teams.

We arrived at the overarching concept of cohesion in our analyses of observations and interviews as we discovered similarity in teachers’ views towards literacy, and similarity in teachers’ views of pupils’ learning strongly connected to the teachers’ sharing of the same space and close personal relationships.

**Inclusion**

In this study, inclusion refers to the inclusion of different professional categories; the inclusion of different pupils and their different languages and scripts/alphabets is described; of pupils with different levels of language knowledge, and also pupils’ different mindsets and norms; even an effort to include parents in their children’s schooling is described.

To start with, continuity and cohesion seemed to form conditions for inclusion. For example, the conditions for joint work between bilingual and Swedish teachers improved considerably when three mother-tongue teachers who also functioned as bilingual pupil assistants for one year were stationed at the school: “[The mother-tongue teacher] was here, all the time! Fabulous! The other mother-tongue teachers … we don’t know who they are” one teacher described the difference between permanent and ambulating mother tongue teachers (ind.int.5). Thus, common space, time in common, and opportunities to communicate proved to be vital characteristics of inclusive work teams.

We also observed increased inclusion regarding all pupils as staff members’ awareness of multilingualism as a resource increased. Focus shifted slightly from Swedish as the norm to a more tolerant attitude towards the use of other languages. One example of this change in attitude was the development of glossaries in different languages (obs.14; ind.int.13). These were created to make language resources more visible and communication easier. According to our observations classroom walls became used
more often as didactic tools: more pictures, symbols, and words in different languages appeared there, reflecting the teachers’ encouraging view of multilingualism (obs.14).

We also observed another dimension of inclusion, namely how furnishing sent signals of positive attitudes towards the role of interaction. In some classrooms, the furniture was rearranged from isolated desks meant to inhibit the pupils from talking in their mother tongues to a horseshoe shape, encouraging pupils to interact (obs.10; ind. int.11).

One example of intercultural pedagogy, as an aspect of inclusion, was observed when legal conditions for same-sex marriage in different countries was discussed in the preparatory class, when the teachers encouraged the pupils to listen to each other’s views on the phenomenon without making any judgements. Instead, all pupils raised their hands to indicate whether same-sex marriages were accepted in their home country or if homosexuality could result in imprisonment. The dialogue that followed was carried out with the help of an interpreting mother-tongue teacher and all the pupils participated regardless of their knowledge of Swedish.

Another dimension of inclusion was observed when one teacher came up with the idea to organise the writing of a class blog that engaged all pupils and included all languages. The blog was very much appreciated by both pupils and parents, as it gave parents the opportunity to follow what happened inside the classroom. The teacher explained: “The parents wondered if their children could learn anything when the classroom was so different from their own experiences. Now, they can see for themselves!” (ind.int.16). A token of the popularity of the blog was that the blog seldom had less than 80 viewings a week, thus shortening the distance between the parents and the classroom.

Another aspect of changed practices to enhance inclusion of parents, according to the reflection notes from the research circles, was when information sheets from teachers and school-age educare personnel started to be distributed in several languages instead of only in Swedish. This was done to reach parents with a limited knowledge of the Swedish language.

In our analyses we arrived at the conclusion that inclusion was the overarching concept for the different steps taken by the teachers to enable communication and intercultural understanding, embracing both the pupils and their parents.

**Obstructing factors**

**Disruption and discontinuities**

The absence of long-lasting relationships between staff members seriously disturbed the development work. There was a steady flow of personnel into and out of the school, and a constant shortage of personnel had serious implications for the LPP. Difficulties to find substitutes for absent personnel increased the workload on the remaining staff members. “The constant change of staff has been very frustrating,” one school-age educare employee remarked. This was a comment often overheard in all research circles.

Regarding the LPP, new staff members had to be introduced to the ongoing development work in the team as they began to know pupils and the school. Thus, the school development project essentially had to restart every time a new staff member was hired.
This discontinuity also affected the research circles, at times leading to a total stop. One circle meeting we attended was characterised by pupils and personnel incessantly running in and out, the former asking for help and the latter trying to assist inexperienced substitute teachers. The increased workload and the never-ending search for substitutes decreased the teachers’ interest and engagement in the LPP.

The mobility of pupils also affected the practices, as pupils continuously enrolled or disenrolled from the school, leading to discontinuity in classrooms and school-age educare. Much of the personnel’s engagement was required to handle these changes, hampering the introduction of new literacy approaches related to the development project.

Discontinuity also characterised the role of the headteacher, who participated in in-service training during the project. His attendance in practice was affected, causing a lack of leadership. The headteacher commented, “A new headteacher with limited experience, like I had at that point, should not be involved in this kind of project” (ind. int.17). His familiarity with the practices, as well as relations with the employees, was hampered, as well as his knowledge of and engagement in the LPP.

As a result of attending headteachers’ meetings with municipal directives for all schools and in-service training with pedagogical ideas, the headteacher instead launched several parallel projects, directing time and attention of the personnel away from the LPP. This created the impression that “nothing is ever brought to an end before the next fancy takes over”, as one teacher expressed it. The idea of the LPP as an “umbrella” programme embracing all activities was never established, leaving an overall impression of discontinuity among the staff.

External context also affected continuity negatively (Ball et al., 2012), as all teachers were forced to focus on assessment and grades instead of on continuous work in favour of the pupils’ overall development. One teacher commented that there were too many national tests and that the focus had shifted from language development activities towards assessments: “I am totally mauled by these national tests … I can’t think of anything else. We are working ourselves to death” (gr.int.7).

In short, the situated and material contexts were dominated overall by the theme of discontinuity: A fluctuating body of pupils, fluctuating staff, and parallel projects obstructed the LPP.

**Fragmentation**

Whereas the section above primarily deals with factors associated with time, this section deals with factors associated with space. Fragmentation is a key concept when referring to the school as a whole, including administrative/structural fragmentation, spatial fragmentation, and an incohesive professional culture.

In terms of administrative authorities, the school was part of a complex network of leadership structures (see Method section). There were serious problems in trying to get the headteacher of the school and the principal of the Competence Centre for Multilingualism together. The librarians belonging to a third administrative unit were also left out. These headteachers did not only belong to different administrative units within the municipality, they were also spatially separated.

Collaboration between the different managers was almost nonexistent, with consequences for the employees. A vital dimension regarded mother-tongue teachers
working under the school’s headteacher, but receiving their salaries according to decisions made by the principal of the Competence Centre of Multilingualism, without any knowledge of their work performance. This led to frustration and plans to leave the work situation (ind.int.9). Regarding our project, consensus between the headteachers concerning the project’s activities was never established. Research circles including mother tongue teachers were, thus, impossible to organise. In short, it was difficult or even impossible to reach and integrate all actors who were supposed to be involved in the LPP.

An additional dimension of the structural turmoil was that planning time and schedules for different units (and also individual actors) were not synchronised. One teacher expressed her frustration with a lack of joint planning time thus: “We don’t even have time for common planning with the school-age educare staff on the planning days” (ind.int.8). The synchronisation of schedules proved so hard to overcome that it took almost a semester before all group interviews with the work teams had been conducted. This situation also delayed the onset of the research circles.

Spatial fragmentation contributed to a material context that did not provide appropriate space for joint work, thus creating an obstacle for cohesion. According to the interviews, lack of access to suitable rooms was a subject of discussion during all three years (gr.int.1,4; ind.int.1,5,12). The fact that classes were placed in different premises obstructed joint work and common ground for this work. That the preschool class during the first year was located in a temporary building 400 m away and some classes were later moved to another building hampered the conditions for joint work.

Thus, the absence of an overall common professional vision or view of didactic issues became another dimension of lack of cohesion that halted the LPP, as a general lack of communication and channels for communication prevented such a vision from taking root. The spatial fragmentation resulted in a strong focus on one’s own pupils, materials, and rooms. Thus, lack of common responsibility among the staff was observed. A mother-tongue teacher commented on the absence of a shared perspective among all the teachers, with a wish that “all staff should regard newly arrived pupils as everybody’s pupils”, something she did not experience (ind.int.9).

To sum up our analyses, different contexts, from the external context to material and situated contexts, contributed to the overall lack of cohesion, with effects for the discursive and interpretative facets affecting the enactment of the LPP.

**Institutionalised exclusions**

Lack of inclusion here refers not only to individuals, but to the whole learning environment, where excluding mechanisms were observed. We observed how school-age educare personnel and school librarians couldn’t attend meetings or planning sessions. However, special attention is given to the vulnerable situation of mother-tongue teachers, bilingual study counsellors and bilingual pupils.

As described above, it was difficult to find times and places for joint development work because of unsynchronised schedules and meeting times between different professional categories. School-age educare staff were often forced to substitute for absent personnel, and therefore did not show up in the research circles. Many of them were not permanent employees; this meant they were not included in the staff and therefore had only weak knowledge of and interest in the LPP.
An important aspect of exclusion was the fact that mother-tongue teachers and bilingual study counsellors were excluded from LPP research circles due to their belonging to the Competence Center for Multilingualism, which had other meeting times, structures, and traditions. The isolated situation of the ambulating mother-tongue teachers resulted not only in physical exclusion, but also a feeling of alienation. One class teacher described the relationship with these teachers as follows: “We never even see the mother-tongue teachers!” (gr.int.2). This was verified by the mother-tongue teachers. As mother tongue teachers primarily worked after scheduled time, other teachers were no longer present. One mother-tongue teacher expressed the situation as “We never see each other, and then there can be no communication”, (ind.int.9) pinpointing the lack of communication between different teachers with respect to informal encounters as well.

Further, the bilingual study counsellors were seen as low-level performers by some staff members. A common view was that the presence of bilingual study counsellors in the classroom was like “having one more pupil to take care of in the class” (ind.int.5). In addition, the presence of bilingual personnel in the school environment was not a prioritised issue of development, according to our interviews with the headteacher.

As indicated above, exclusion also applied to the school librarians. Belonging to another organisation, they were not included in the school organisation. One teacher commented, “We all agree that it is difficult to collaborate. There is no scheduled common planning time”, (ind. int.13) as a plan for a systematic cooperation between library and school did not exist. According to our observations only one dedicated librarian was able to participate in a research circle for a short period of time.

An important dimension to consider, was the monolingual norm that prevailed in most classrooms and among many of the teachers (obs.2,3; gr.int.3,8; ind.int.1,2,3). This excluding mechanism also affected the pupils, not least when it came to attitudes towards other languages, enabling a monolingual norm to prevail in the school: “We only speak Swedish in the classroom, so that you can’t slander others with your classmates in your mother tongue,” (gr.int.3) one teacher expressed the state of affairs.

Thus, the discursive facet clearly affected the LPP work. Bilingual pupils were discussed in terms of being low-achieving and problematic pupils, an attitude spilling over to parents, who were considered to be ignorant or uninterested in their children’s school lives. According to the reflection notes from the research circle, a school-age educare staff member’s comment about three extraordinarily quiet girls in the preparatory class, newly arrived from a Syrian war zone, illustrates this discourse: “Are they dumb? They don’t say anything!”

To sum up, material and situated contexts contributed to a school environment exposing mechanisms of exclusion. However, discursive aspects stood out in our analyses of data, when some individuals talked about bilingual personnel or pupils who did not yet have a good command of the Swedish language, thus appointing exclusion as an epitomising theme for this category of factors obstructing the enactment of the LPP.

Discussion and conclusion

Factors facilitating and obstructing the enactment of the LPP were identified. Continuity in terms of the same individuals developing personal relations and routines
together over time stands out as a facilitating factor, a factor that was missing in a majority of the classes. Cohesion also characterised the self-contained groups where positive development was observed, in particular with respect to discursive factors such as viewing multilingualism as a resource to explore for didactic purposes (Bunar, 2017; Cummins, 2000; Petersson & Norén, 2017). Where continuity and cohesion (and, as a consequence, inclusion) were not found, the enactment of the LPP did not take place to the same extent, or even at all. These factors obstructing the enactment of the LPP also limited the research process. For example, lack of continuity among employees made it difficult to explore changes in the work teams over time. In addition, the time span of the three-year project was short to address sustainable changes. Another limitation is related to the fact that interviews as the main method may have been affected to a certain extent by social desirability. Some of the limitations were contextual factors, out of reach for both personnel and researchers. However, conditions for communication and how the leadership situation shaped the school should have been mapped before the onset of the project. According to our self-reflections, knowledge of such background information might have contributed to more sustainable results.

Nevertheless, it is important to notice that fruitful development in the LPP did occur in a few groups of teachers where continuity and cohesion functioned as conditions for one another, enabling inclusion. However, this development was built largely on individuals’ initiatives, emphasising that enactment of policy did not equal development of the working of the school as a whole.

On the contrary, the LPP did not reach out to or embed itself with most teachers or practices. In our study, it was obvious how contextual and psychosocial dynamics influenced the enactment of the LPP. In these fragmented premises with dissimilar professional cultures, no systematic, overall plan was put to work. We found three factors that shaped this situation – namely, the issues of communication, leadership, and external factors.

First, communication at the school failed at several levels and between different individuals and groups due to a range of causes linked to the material, situated, and external contexts (Ball et al., 2012; Braun et al., 2011). Channels of communication were not in place. In addition, the scattered physical premises prevented both formal and informal encounters. Finding times for personal meetings was also a problem due to unsynchronised timetables and the fact that certain personnel (i.e. bilingual personnel and librarians) belonged to different units, which resulted in a lack of both time and space for personal encounters. These material factors were strongly interwoven with dissimilar professional cultures and attitudes that evolved. The professional segregation may have had an impact on the perspectives towards colleagues, as mother-tongue teachers, librarians, and school-age educare personnel were not seen as equal co-workers. This probably further obstructed communication.

Second, leadership, as several studies indicate (e.g. Hult et al., 2016; Löfqvist, 2015), is important for school development, influencing all aspects of enactment, such as culture and contexts (Ball et al., 2012). With a brand-new headteacher, neither management nor pedagogical leadership was in place. The headteacher drowned in administrative tasks (see Adolfsson & Alvunger, 2020; SOU, 2015, p. 22) and placed the LPP low on his to-do list. As the headteacher was often physically absent, away for meetings or in-service training, the school, metaphorically speaking, often resembled a ship
without a captain, leaving steering and navigation to the teachers, increasing their workload. Thus, the project was perceived not as a possibility, but as yet another burden in an already complicated and burdensome professional life (see Adolfsson & Alvunger, 2020; Lundström et al., 2017). The LPP became a vessel of its own with only a few passengers, leaving a majority of teachers on the embankment without proper knowledge of its destination. It became a project appearing in everyday talk as an unimportant ingredient of school life.

Third, factors linked to the external context affected the progression of the LPP. Much time was dedicated to the handling of national tests, pushing out the LPP from teachers’ agendas. In addition, the labelling of the school as a low-status school was reinforced by its placement in a multilingual suburb. Competition with other schools regarding pupils’ results reinforced the status: The large percentage of newly arrived pupils was automatically reflected in poor school-wide test results; this in turn lessened the attractiveness of the school for new teachers, mirrored by the fast flow of personnel. Competition also affected attractiveness in terms of pupils’ choice to attend the school, as many pupils left the school for higher status alternatives. Thus, pressure from NMP influences had a negative impact on professional identity, culture, and everyday life (Lundahl et al., 2013).

The results display an intricate web of circumstances and aspects such as material, situated, and external contexts which were interwoven in the creation of both supportive and obstructive factors influencing the enactment of the LPP. These factors were strengthened or weakened by different interpretative and discursive facets in the school’s multifaceted setting. To conclude, no single factor on its own may explain the LPP’s success or failure.

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