

Ideologies and practices in a kindergarten offering early education in Northern Sámi outside the Sámi homeland

Borbála Pachné Heltai, Research Institute for Linguistics, Hungarian Academy of Sciences
Csilla Bartha, Research Institute for Linguistics, Hungarian Academy of Sciences

In this study we analyse data collected in a Finnish kindergarten where one of the groups offers immersion education in Northern Sámi, an endangered language. The kindergarten is located outside the Sámi homeland in a majority city of Finland. This fact sets up extra challenges, but also offers possibilities for the promotion of multilingual competencies. First we review some possible categorizations of multilingual educational forms and highlight the advantages of adopting a multilingual habitus in education (Benson, 2014). The group we studied works partially as a language nest, thus we discuss this method in some detail. After that, we introduce the data and the method we used for their interpretation. We present the results by discussing three topics: the broader social context; the diversity of the linguistic repertoires of the participants; and the learning environment and organization of everyday activities. Our findings show that active cooperation between the participants, alignment with the local needs and resources, and flexibility toward language practices are crucial for successful education and the promotion of the non-dominant language and culture¹.

Keywords: language nest, multilingual education, Sámis

1 Introduction

In today's globalized world we all live in a multilingual environment where diverse languages, language varieties, modalities, registers and genres are being mobilized during everyday communication. In order to maximize the cognitive and thus the economic potential both of speakers of dominant and those of non-dominant languages, education should capitalize on this linguistic heterogeneity and promote children's linguistic awareness (Hélot, 2012, Martin, 2016). One potential way to do that is to create educational contexts in which children with different ethnic, cultural, and/or linguistic backgrounds can mutually benefit from each other's linguistic and cultural resources. The present paper introduces a good example of that situation. We will examine data (interviews, photos, videos and observations) collected in a Finnish kindergarten where one of the groups offers full immersion minority education in Northern Sámi. While the aim of this

Corresponding author's email: heltaibori@gmail.com

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kindergarten group is the revitalization of the non-dominant language, also the other, Finnish groups can profit from the linguistic and cultural heterogeneity of the institution. We consider this kindergarten group as a good practice that can help us understand what makes multilingual education attractive and effective. In particular, we are interested in the following questions:

- What is the social context of the activity examined here and what kinds of linguistic and pedagogical challenges and advantages arise from the specific circumstances?
- What kinds of pedagogical practices are typical in the group regarding language development and the promotion of Sámi culture?
- For non-Finnish researchers, another important question arises: avoiding essentialism, what could be utilized from this special context in other parts of the world in order to improve education for diverse groups of children? More specifically, we will apply the experiences gained here in another research project called *Languag-E-Chance*. The project aims at the development of a methodology which identifies, acknowledges and builds upon children's different social, linguistic and cultural environment that surrounds them in the family and outside the school. The project is a four-year-long research, supported by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences².

In what follows, as a theoretical introduction, we will give a brief overview of possible multilingual educational modes that involve non-dominant languages in one way or another. Since the kindergarten group examined here operates partly as a language nest, we discuss the issue of language nests in some detail. After that we move on to the Finnish context and review some cornerstones of the situation of Sámi languages and their place in preschool education in Finland. It is followed by the introduction of the data and methods used in the paper, by the presentation of the results, and finally by a concluding discussion.

2 About multilingual educational forms

Throughout the world there are educational models in which the language of the educational institute partly or wholly differs from the dominant language of the surrounding social environment. Since in different parts of the world these educational forms operate in various social-economical-political contexts and for various reasons (for example, the promotion of the languages of indigenous populations or the increasing number of children with migrant backgrounds), there are plenty of differences between them (Cenoz, 2013). No wonder that heterogeneity is also typical of the concepts and terms in the literature on multilingual education. On the one hand, this heterogeneity relates to the terms used for the different languages involved in bi/multilingual education (*first language/second language, heritage language/official language, indigenous language/national language, and minority language/majority language* – just to mention a few). On the other hand, the educational programs have diverse names, too (*bilingual/multilingual education, heritage language education, minority education, etc.*). Following the suggestion of Benson (2014), in the present paper we prefer using the more neutral terms *non-dominant* and *dominant language* and *education in non-dominant language*. With the former pair of terms we refer here to the Northern Sámi and the Finnish language, respectively.

Several authors have tried to categorize multilingual educational forms (see for example Baker, 2011, García & Wei, 2014). Cenoz (2013, p. 3.) notes that, as a broad categorization, we can distinguish transitional, maintenance and enrichment programs according to the linguistic background of the children and the aims of the education. While *transitional programs* aim at language shift from the non-dominant language to the dominant language (thus, as Cenoz emphasises, they cannot be considered as modes of multilingual education), *maintenance* and *enrichment* programs aim at developing bilingualism.

Carol Benson (2014) offers a possible categorization of the diverse contexts of multilingual education throughout the world. As a highly imprecise but still useful metaphor, she distinguishes between Northern and Southern contexts to refer to high- and low-income countries. According to Benson, the main difference between the two is that the majority of students entering school in many Southern countries use non-dominant languages, while speakers of non-dominant languages tend to be in a minority in the North. However, in both contexts, the majority of the speakers of non-dominant languages have to attend programs that use only or mostly the dominant language. These educational programs either ignore the linguistic differences (*submersion programmes*), or conform to the children's background to a certain extent (*immersion programmes*). As a middle course there are the programs based on the development of learners' skills in each language that Benson (2014, p. 17) calls *mother tongue-based multilingual education*.

Non-dominant languages can play a role in a number of ways in different educational settings, from being a *school subject* or an *extra class* after the school day to being the *medium of instruction* (Gorter & Zenotz & Cenoz, 2014, Kosonen & Benson, 2013). The involvement of the non-dominant languages may have two main reasons. The possibility to use the students' first language contributes to the successful learning process in the dominant language. Besides, the maintenance or revitalization of the non-dominant language can be a reason, too. Whatever the main reason of the involvement of the non-dominant language is, sooner or later the aim is to achieve proficiency in the dominant language as well (Benson, 2014, p. 17). One possible way to maximize the linguistic and cognitive potential is to adopt a multilingual habitus in education and to promote *multilingual competencies* (Benson, 2014, García & Flores, 2012) or – to use here a recent European concept – to promote *plurilingual* and *intercultural competencies*.

García and Flores (2012) also argue for the effectiveness of *plurilingual/heteroglossic instruction*. They distinguish four different types of multilingual pedagogies:

- Foreign language instruction
- Second language instruction
- Bilingual/monoglossic instruction (native language pedagogies + second language/immersion pedagogies)
- Plurilingual/heteroglossic instruction (dynamic bi-/plurilingual pedagogies)

The first three are based on a monoglossic ideology according to which language learning is a linear process and the skills in the different languages should be developed separately and linearly. In the case of traditional bilingual instruction the aim is additive bilingualism. Students are expected to separate the languages and balanced bilingualism is being developed. In these types children are successful learners if they have equal competencies in both languages and can use their competencies in every situation, regardless to the concrete contexts or

interlocutors. Contrarily, the fourth type of multilingual pedagogies (*plurilingual/heteroglossic instruction*) is based on a heteroglossic ideology. These programs do not separate languages as entities that should be developed autonomously: they acknowledge fluid language practices and make use of the heterogeneity of students' competencies. "The bilingualism that these programs promote is more dynamic, in the sense that language practices are multiple and ever adjusting to the multilingual multimodal terrain of the communicative act in the twenty-first century" (García & Flores, 2012, p. 236). García calls elsewhere (2009) such fluid language practices *translanguaging*; García and Wei (2014, pp. 19-43) give a detailed description of the process and impacts of the so-called *traslanguaging turn*. A flexible, dynamic view of mobilising multiple linguistic resources is especially of high importance in the process traditionally called language revitalization, when children often have different competencies in the non-dominant language and they may bring bits and pieces of their home languages to the institution. If the institution offers a possibility for children with different backgrounds to learn together – as it is the case in the kindergarten presented in this paper – there is even more potential to raise language awareness and multilingual competencies. Although the language nest program we studied in Oulu is declared to be an *immersion revitalization program*, we experienced educational practices both in the minority group and in the whole institution that appreciate and utilize the presence of diverse language resources and competencies.

3 Language nests as a tool of language revitalization

According to McCarty and Nicholas (2012), in the past four decades a rising activism of indigenous communities can be observed throughout the world, and as a result various bi/multilingual educational programs have been developed in order to revitalize indigenous languages. However, as the authors remind us, early developments of indigenous education systems can be characterized by practices that are a prerequisite of successful minority education today, too. Family- and community-based activities that rest on shared responsibility between parents and child or the use of multiple modalities (the joint promotion of oral and written literacy) were important features of knowledge transmission in indigenous communities already in pre-colonial times.

The first language nest was established in 1982 in New Zealand. In order to revitalize the Māori language, an all-day care system was created for children under school-age. The children spent their days with the elder members of the community – who spoke the Māori language – thus learning the language from them. Soon, the Māori example was followed during the revitalization of Hawaiian. Based upon this prototypical scheme of the Māoris, today there are an increasing number of activities around the world, which have the aim to create a natural space for young children to learn the endangered language of a given community (McCarty & Nicholas, 2012, Pasanen, 2015, Sallabank, 2012).

As Pasanen (2015, p. 202) emphasizes, today language nests are mainly all-day care systems for preschool children, where educators use the non-dominant, often endangered language with the children all the time, from the very beginning, regardless of the level of the children's competence in the given language. What is important in this model is that language learning does not occur in a formal way, but during the everyday activities and often members of the community are

involved in the activities, too. The children are allowed to use the dominant language, but the teachers gradually motivate them to use the non-dominant language. A further important aim is that the child begins to use the language outside of the language nest. This often results in the parents starting to learn the language. As the literature emphasizes, for successful language revitalization it would be necessary that the child continues to learn the non-dominant language at school. However, due to the low social status of endangered languages, this is often problematic (Keskitalo & Määttä & Uusiautti, 2014, Pasanen, 2010, 2015).

4 The Sámi languages and language nests in Finland

The Constitution of Finland recognizes the Sámis as an indigenous people. The rights to use their native language in court and in other authorities in state and municipal agencies are laid down by The Sámi language Act (*Saamen kielilaki* 1086/2003). All three Sámi languages spoken in Finland (Northern, Skolt and Inari) are endangered languages. According to Keskitalo & Määttä & Uusiautti (2012, p. 331.) about 9500 Sámi people live in the country, and the majority of those who speak Sámi at all speaks Northern Sámi (about 2000 people). Around 70% of the children under 10 years live outside the Sámi homeland, and that is among the main reasons for the language shift of the Sámi communities (Aikio-Puoskari, 2007, p. 81).

In Finland there are two ways in which the child can participate in Sámi early education. According to the amendment from 1981 of the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care from 1973 (*Varhaiskasvatustaki* 19.1.1973/36), the settlements must provide care in the Finnish, Swedish or Sámi mother tongue of the child (note, however, that the act refers only to “the Sámi language”). If the parents register Sámi as the mother tongue of the child in the population register, early education should be organized in Sámi. However, in practice, due to the lack of resources, e.g. trained educators, difficulties are often encountered, especially in settlements outside the Sámi homeland. The other possibility is to participate in a language nest, which are created by Sámi communities and are operated mainly by state financial support via the Sámi parliament.

The first language nest in Finland was opened for Skolt Sámi in 1993. Greater success in the Finnish context can be registered since 1997 when the first Inari Sámi language nest was founded. Following the Inari Sámi accomplishments, the first Northern Sámi language nest was established in 2007. The language nests were especially successful in the revitalization of Inari Sámi. As Pasanen (2015, pp. 352–353) concluded, thanks to the revitalization activities, the absolute number of speakers increased and intergenerational transmission of the language started again. The Finnish example also affected the revitalization of other endangered Uralic languages in Russia, where language nest activities have also been organized (McCarty & Nicholas, 2012, p. 154, Pasanen, 2010, 2015.). According to the data of Aikio-Puoskari & Saamelaiskäräjät (2016), in 2016 there were 11 Sámi language nests in Finland, out of which three were located in cities outside the Sámi territories (in Helsinki, Rovaniemi and Oulu).

Pasanen (2015) gives a thorough overview of the main challenges of language nests. One of them is financial insecurity: despite the supportive legal environment one has to apply for the aid annually and activities can often only be realized in the frame of a project. Another problematic area is the motivation of the parents. Because of the scarcity of properly trained teachers, learning

materials and the fact that the parents themselves often do not speak the language, they tend to be less motivated about the idea of education in the non-dominant language and the lack of continuity also questions the results achieved during early education.

5 Data and methodology

The data analysed in this paper was collected in the summer of 2015 in a kindergarten of the city of Oulu in Northern Finland. The kindergarten is a majority city-run institution, but in one of its groups education is organized in the Northern Sámi language. During the one week of our ethnographic fieldwork, a multi-modal data set was collected. The data includes interviews with employees of the kindergarten and parents of the children learning in the Sámi group (the interviews were conducted in Finnish); observations and notes on the everyday activities of the Sámi group and also of other groups of the institution; as well as video and audio recordings and photos. Supportive documents (development plans and instructions) were also studied. The data are anonymous, during the analysis we did not use the name of the children, the parents or the teachers. The extracts in the paper are translated into English, the original Finnish texts can be found in the appendix³.

At the time of the fieldwork there were 11 children between the ages of 1 and 6 and three adults in the Sámi group. The group had an educator who was a native speaker of Northern Sámi and had kindergarten teacher's qualification, but during our fieldwork she was on vacation. We interviewed (1) the educator who was responsible for the operation of the language nest and who was a "new speaker" (O'Rourke & Pujolar & Ramallo, 2015) of Sámi, e.g. she had studied the language at the university of Oulu. All of the extracts marked as a citation from a teacher in this paper are her words, unless otherwise indicated. We also conducted an interview with (2) a permanent colleague who was starting her pedagogical studies and (3) a substitute colleague. Both of them had learnt the non-dominant language in the family as a child, but they also used the dominant language on a regular basis in diverse contexts from the workplace to the family (as they told us in the interviews). Besides, we carried out interviews with two parents and with further three employees – working in other groups –, the principal, the deputy head of the kindergarten and a permanent employee (who had a job other than teaching).

In this paper we make use of critical concepts of sociolinguistics and discourse analysis in order to present our main findings. However, more traditional terms (*bilingualism*, *native speaker*, *dialect*, etc.) emerge in the analysis, too, because they were used actively in the local context and in the metalanguage of the interviews. Our starting point is that the Sámi language nest operates in the nexus of diverse social processes, ideologies and participants (cf. Martin-Jones & Blackledge & Creese, 2012, Scollon & Scollon, 2004). This means that the broader social context (macro-level) influences the everyday activities of the group (micro-level) and vice versa. To be able to highlight the crucial connections between these two, we will analyse three specific focus points within the larger context of the language nest. The analysis is data-driven, thus the three crucial points emerged from the interviews and our observations in the field.

(1) First we discuss the broader (social and institutional) context of the activity of the kindergarten group. We would like to know what has motivated that

specific activity and what (linguistic) ideologies are present and influence the educational processes in the group. We use the term *linguistic ideology* here in its broader sense, i.e. referring to the notions and ideas various participants have about language and language practices (Gal, 2002, Schieffelin & Woolard & Kroskrity, 1998). We will present interview extracts representing typical and/or central ideas of the participants. Focusing on the ideologies is in our view crucial, because they influence the choices and behaviour of the different participants, and therefore the outcome of education.

(2) After this, we characterize the participants who act in that context. We use the concept of *linguistic repertoire* (see for example Gal, 1987) and highlight the heterogeneity of the linguistic and semiotic resources available for the participants. Our aim is to explore the methodological consequences of the linguistic diversity one can observe and experience in the group we studied.

(3) Finally, we highlight some of our observations regarding how the participants construct the *learning environment* and through that how they form their everyday activities. Here our starting point is that the learning environment is not a pre-defined, static background; rather, it is a constantly changing construction influenced by the ideologies and interactions of the different participants.

5.1 Social and institutional context of the language nest in Oulu

Oulu is the fifth largest city in Finland with a population of 200 000. It is one of the closest university cities near the Sámi homeland. The timber industry of the city is significant and it is a nationwide outstanding technology centre, too. Due to the job opportunities and services, the city attracts many people from the Northern regions. In other words, Oulu is the centre of the North, “the capital of Northern Scandinavia” as the slogan of the city goes. However, the capital Helsinki and its surrounding attracts even more people (cf. Tiihonen, 2016), and from this point of view, Oulu belongs to the periphery (Pietikäinen & Kelly-Holmes, 2013).

Although is not located in Sámi territories, Oulu is an important centre for the Sámi language and culture. This is the only place in the country where one can study the Sámi language and culture as a major. Some parents of children attending the kindergarten group teach or study at the university. A Sámi cultural association operates in the city, too.

Due to the mobility coming from working and learning possibilities, there is a significant Sámi community in Oulu. However, not all the minority education practices reach the level expected from a settlement that can be labelled as a “centre” as it can be concluded from the following extract from an interview conducted with one of the parents:

Extract 1

According to the statistics, there are 600–700 Sámis living here which should mean that it would be easy to create a Sámi class. However, you can't, you can't see them. So ten children participate in this group and we have no idea what will happen to them when they start the preschool and then they can go to the first class, so then they will only have two language classes in a week. But only if all is well. (28-year-old father)

In this extract the father highlighted his worries that due to the location in a city outside the Sámi homeland there is a smaller chance of Sámi education at school.

On the other hand, later in the interview he stated that it is the members of the community who can do the most for minority education, and the lack of education in Sámi cannot be blamed on external causes, such as the city of Oulu. He emphasized that the fact that they are living in a city outside the Sámi territories, increases the responsibility of the individuals in preserving the language and the culture:

Extract 2

There are relatively good circumstances in the Sámi regions for living as a Sámi. But if, if for some reasons one has to leave from there, then one can see that the situation is not so bright elsewhere. But yes, it depends on your own attitude, too, so that how much you are willing to take the trouble for this issue. (...) Yesterday I started to think about this that when we came here in the morning, (...) we had some breakfast at home and we listened to the Sámi radio [on smartphone] for a moment, then we came here by the car, to the Sámi kindergarten with our children, we talked in Sámi to the educator, after that I went to the university, and there is the Sámi faculty, and the other students and employees and with them I speak in Sámi. Then later I picked up the kids, we went home and incidentally there were the news in Sámi on TV. So yes, really, it all depends on whether one is willing to take the trouble. How much you are willing to do for that. So I think that somehow it would not be fair from me for example to expect the city of Oulu to offer Sámi kindergartens for my children and to raise them as Sámi speakers. (...) If we spoke Finnish at home and Sáminess would not be present at all. So I cannot make it work for anyone else.

The father appreciates the good circumstances and positive social-legal environment in the Sámi region which allows to live “as a Sámi” (e.g. to speak the language and have education in the Sámi languages). Later he contrasts these circumstances with the situation in the city, where it much more depends on the individual what kind of role the language and the culture will play in his or her life.

Besides this contrast between the Sámi homeland and the Finnish city, there is another duality affecting the discourse about the resources at hand: the differences between Finland and Norway. In the narratives Norway appeared as a central site for Sámis with a better legislative environment, bigger financial support, and more educational resources. Similarly to the Finnish cities, Norway is quite attractive for Sámi employees. This duality was thematised by the teacher responsible for the language nest in connection with the availability of the learning material:

Extract 3

We translated books for the families. So they have children’s books in Finnish. There are hardly any in Sámi. So we translated the texts into Sámi so that the parents could read from them. Despite the fact they can pronounce Sámi they cannot themselves translate into it, however, they can read out the complete text. (...) All in all we lack all kinds of materials. Of course there is some, but we constantly have to create and translate more. (...) And it is also hard to get them, because they are sold in Inari and in Norway. So we, the staff, have to go there. (...) It is possible to order materials for the Finnish classes, you have everything here in Oulu, while we have to travel to Inari. (...) But they also have to order from Norway a part of it. All in all, it’s quite complicated. (27 year-old woman)

This extract shows how pedagogical practices have to be changed according to the local possibilities. Due to the lack of children’s books in Sámi, the teachers translated books from Finnish and these new learning materials are used not only in the kindergarten, but also at home. The extract also highlights that when it

comes to learning materials, the Oulu Sámi group does not only fall behind as compared to Norway, but it also lags compared to the other, Finnish groups of the kindergarten. However, these difficulties deepen the cooperation between the parents and the teachers.

Sámi education in the kindergarten studied started in this broader context in 2002. First upon the demand of the parents there was, once a week, a kindergarten club for five children. The children spent the other days in Finnish kindergartens. The sessions were led by the native Sámi kindergarten teacher. (By the term *native speaker* we refer in the present article to a person who has acquired the given language in the family as a child.) She was still the teacher of the group at the time of the fieldwork. In 2010, a so-called mother tongue program started for the children whose parents registered Sámi as the child's mother tongue and who used the language at home, too. First the participating four children spent ten days a month in the kindergarten. Later, the number of the children started to increase. The language nest activity officially started in 2014, after a research of the Sámi parliament (conducted by Laura Arola) drew the attention to the demand for such an initiative (Arola, 2014).

At the time of the data collection, the kindergarten group officially worked in two forms: as a mother tongue group and as a language nest. The difference between the two was that in the case of the latter the child did not have to have any competence in the Sámi language. In practice the two groups operated as one and the same. The mother tongue group was supported by the city, while the operation of the language nest was supported by state financial support via the Sámi parliament. As the following extract from the interview with the educator of the language nest shows, due to the two forms and the start of the language nest the teachers faced methodological challenges:

Extract 4

We were wondering whether we should start it at all, whether it is possible for the mother tongue group and the language nest children to be in the same group, because it also can be problematic that after all, the rights of the native children should also be respected for the development of the native Sámi level. And if there is a language nest child who just started to learn the language, how will it be possible for the rights of both groups to prevail? Can we keep the balance? But finally we came up with a solution, so we divide the group based on the children's language skills. (...) That we divide the children into small groups more often than we did earlier.

During the interview the teacher also explained that before the official start of the language nest, there were already children in the group who did not hear the language at home. As the teacher emphasized the language nest was regarded as a peripheral activity for those families who used the language at home actively: **(Extract 5)** *Some of the native parents asked how the rights of their children would prevail. They did not want their children to learn the language as a foreign language, but they wanted them to develop such a rich mother tongue level knowledge.* In such worries we may spot the ideology which overrates native competencies and values them as "rich" or "real" while minority language skills and language learning in a non-native environment get underrated (cf. O'Rourke et al., 2015). This tension has an important methodological consequence: the grouping is based on language skills and work goes on in small groups. However, the division does not happen right on the official border between the native group and the language nest group as it can be concluded from the words of the teacher:

Extract 6

I agree with A. A., who is a professor of Sámi language at the University of Oulu and said that language competencies of Sámi children in the cities cannot be characterized as black and white, we cannot put natives into one corner and language nest children to the other, they are all somewhere in the middle. (...) That is what we tried to explain to the parents that the division is not made between language nest children and natives, but it is made based on how well they know the language.

The teacher explained here that the division happens according to the language competencies of the children. To put it in other words, the categories based on the top-down language policy do not work in the local practice, but the group has its own categories based on the everyday experiences.

5.2 Diversity of the linguistic repertoires

The linguistic biographies and language practices of the children going to the kindergarten group, as well as those of their parents and teachers, are heterogeneous. During the fieldwork, there were three pairs of siblings among the 11 children. According to the information we got from the educators, in the case of two pairs of siblings one of the parents was a native speaker of Sámi and the other one spoke Finnish. In the case of the third pair, the Finnish parent learnt Sámi as a foreign language. In the case of two further children one of the parents was a native speaker, the other was learning the language at home. One of the children had a mother who had passive language knowledge. Finally there was also a child whose parents had neither active nor passive knowledge of the language⁴. This diversity means that the parents all have different expectations regarding Sámi education and it also resulted in children having different levels of language competencies. Two of them were under one year old, therefore still in the early stages of language acquisition. According to the educators, three children had quite well-balanced Finnish and Sámi language skills, while in case of the other children Finnish dominated.

As mentioned above, two of the educators we met during the fieldwork had learnt Sámi at home. In the case of the third teacher, the grandparents' generation had stopped using the Sámi language. This teacher relearned the language at the university. In the case of this "new speaker" the university was the centre of the Sámi language and culture, not the family or the Sámi territories. She uses the language in new sites and modalities – compared to the traditional ones – in her job as an educator, with her friends or on online forums (cf. O'Rourke et al., 2015, Pasanen, 2015, p. 345). The start of the language nest program happened mainly thanks to her competencies because she previously participated in a project about initiating a language nest in the capital.

The next extract from the interview with the teacher emphasizes how much the different family backgrounds affect the competencies of the children. We asked why one of the children (S.) only answered in Finnish:

Extract 7

R. spent last spring with his father in U., and all the relatives spoke Sámi and in the kindergarten there was Sámi, the language was present everywhere. N. and E. spent last summer with some relatives – who do not speak Finnish, only Norwegian and Sámi – in Norway. And they had to speak Sámi. Now in the autumn when they came here, they all spoke Sámi very well. But S. spent all the summer in Oulu, surrounded by a Finnish environment.

The extract highlights that in the context of Oulu the kindergarten is the central site of language acquisition (and of language use in the case of the educators, too). However, if the children return to kindergarten after having spent a long time in a Sámi environment, their active language use increases and the environment of the Finnish city becomes an underrated venue of language learning.

It was clear from both the parents' and the teachers' interviews that they think that, in order to achieve active competence in the Sámi language, children should use the language outside the kindergarten, too. It requires some sacrifice and flexibility on the part of the parents and the broader environment, too. Methodologically this leads to the idea of shared responsibility: the educators try to encourage the parents and the broader family to learn and use the language with the children (Äärelä, 2015, McCarty & Nicholas, 2012, pp. 146-147). This can lead to the parents developing their passive competence into active language skills; in other cases, the parents start learning the minority language or they ask relatives to speak Sámi to the children.

In the kindergarten teachers tried to use Sámi with the parents as well. They often had conversations based on resources from both languages; the parents with passive knowledge mainly answered in Finnish while the teacher spoke to them in Sámi. Resources from both languages were also present on the visual level, as it can be seen in Figure 1. Depending on the language competencies of the parents, the teachers left messages to the parents in Sámi or in both languages on the children's lockers. In the picture we see the message 'Diapers running out!' above in Sámi and below in Finnish. With the use of both languages it is ensured that the parents understand the message and at the same time they can acquire the Sámi version. The physical position of the texts indicates that the Sámi has a higher prestige in the group than the dominant language.



Figure 1. Messages to the parents in two languages.

According to our experiences the educators only spoke in the non-dominant language with the children, all activities were rich in repetitive linguistic and nonverbal input (cf. Äärelä, 2015). Depending on the language competencies, the children were allowed to answer in Sámi or in Finnish, or by using resources from

both languages in order to foster equal participation regardless of the linguistic competencies in the non-dominant language (cf. García & Flores, 2012, pp. 240–243). When talking to each other the children used the linguistic resources available for them according to the topic and the participants of the conversation. However, the educators tried to motivate the children in several ways to use the Sámi language, for example with the help of symbolic contracts, which means that one is allowed to use only a given language in a specific room or while doing a specific activity.

The diversity was not only present in connection with the dominant and non-dominant language; the diversity of the different Sámi languages was also thematized in the group as can be concluded from the next extract of the teacher's interview:

Extract 8

We talked about the issue that there are different Sámi languages. For example, we have some Inari and Skolt books on the shelf, we got them as a present and we looked at it and saw that the words were a little different. Then there are children who know people speaking a different Sámi language in the North and we talked about the different languages.

Here the teacher describes how the children meet other Sámi varieties through the learning materials or relatives inside and outside the kindergarten. The educators valued linguistic diversity in general positively. The teacher responsible for the language nest program also missed the dialectal variability in the group: (Extract 9) *In the group all the children speak the Eastern dialect. (...) I would be happy if there was a child speaking the Western dialect. This way the children could meet a little bit different language.* Also the parents considered linguistic diversity and the knowledge brought from home as an important factor which influences the process of language acquisition. To the question what an ideal language nest teacher was like we received the following answer from one of the parents:

Extract 10

Of course it would be important that she or he is interested in the child as an individual. Because these children are all different, coming from a quite different background and they have different language competencies. So the teachers should be interested and consider this background of the child, and they should be able to work with the language based on this information. I think it is a quite difficult task. (41-year-old mother)

Linguistic variability and the local variety of the Finnish language as an identity marker were also mentioned in the interviews conducted with one of the teachers of a Finnish group: (Extract 11) *So we use the Oulu variety with the children. At least I use the Oulu dialect a lot and I have spoken it really on purpose, because it belongs to me and I didn't change it in any way. (...) So at least I think that it is part of Oulu life and part of the idea 'Me in Oulu'.* In the extract the teacher mentions the idea 'Me in Oulu' on which the development plan of the kindergarten is based (in the case of the Sámi group it is the idea "Me as Sámi in Oulu"). This idea could also be found in many ways in both linguistic and visual forms in the Sámi group. In Figure 2 the idea "Me as Sámi in Oulu" is constructed visually. In the background we can see a huge Sámi flag and the symbol of Oulu (the statue of the policeman which is located on the market square). The local people, who fill up the big square in

the heart of the city, are Sámis: it is clear from the traditional Sámi dresses they are wearing. This composition conveys the message that the Sámis are not only part of the city, but they are an active and visible community, too.



Figure 2. Constructing the idea visually “Me as Sámi in Oulu”.

5.3 *The learning environment and organization of everyday activities*

The kindergarten studied here is a large one regarding the number of people (with about 170 to 180 children and 35 employees, out of them 14 kindergarten teachers) and also in terms of the size of the physical space. It is a multi-storey building with big courtyards. During the fieldwork the Sámi group used seven rooms regularly. According to the interview conducted with the teacher of the group, there are both pedagogical advantages and disadvantages of the Sámi group being a minority group in a majority kindergarten:

Extract 12

On the one hand the disadvantages come from the Finnish speaking environment that it is impossible to create a purely Sámi environment (...). On the other hand it is good that we are here. We, the employees get a lot of professional support, we get help if there are some problems with a child. And there is the question of learning materials compared to other language nests. The financial support received by the language nests is quite meagre and they have to buy all the toys, craft tools, everything. And here, if we think about it, how many toys there are in the kindergarten and only by switching toys with the other groups, by bringing here other toys from another group, the children can get acquainted with a huge vocabulary.

The extract highlights that the peripheral location with its Finnish-speaking environment compared to the Sámi territories is a disadvantage, but it turns into an advantage when it comes to resources.

The multimodal and diverse input based on the genres of the non-dominant culture (cf. McCarty & Nicholas, 2012, pp. 147–148) was not only typical for verbal communication, but also for the learning environment: there were bilingual and

monolingual Sámi captions, texts, poems, rhymes, pictures, drawings made by the children and there were objects related to the culture on the furniture and on the walls. The Sámi language was also present in other rooms of the kindergarten.

The educators of the Sámi group also encouraged adults working with the other groups to learn the basic expressions in Sámi. In Figure 3 we see a caption made by the Sámi group for the kindergarten teachers of the Finnish groups. With this visual element the kindergarten teachers can learn how to say *Buorre idit* ‘Good morning’. For representing the pronunciation a common resource, English, is used. The aim of initiatives like this multilingual text is to improve the status of the Sámi language within the institution as the teacher of the Sámi group underlined in the following extract: (Extract 13) *It was the same idea that we want to make the minority language to be seen, to pay attention to it in other ways, too. We want the children to feel that the language is valuable. That other people use it, too. That it is not only important for a little group, but it’s an issue for the whole kindergarten.*

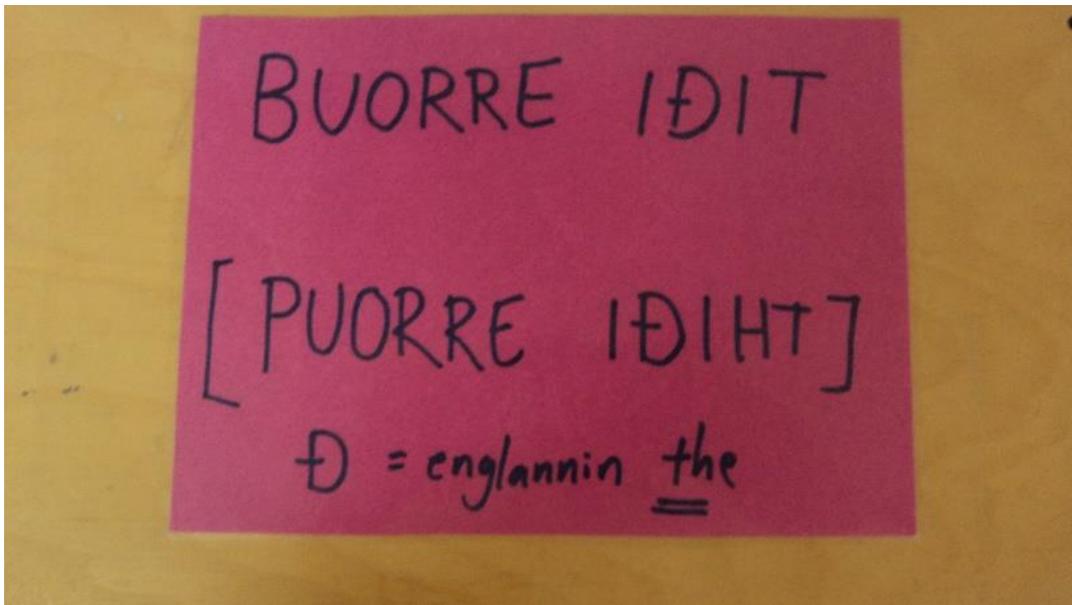


Figure 3. Valuing the minority language.

In the kindergarten there is a common area used not only by the Sámi group, but by the whole kindergarten as well: the so-called “Sámi land”. For the Sámi group it was a central site: during the fieldwork they used it every day in various ways. For example, this is where the ritual rhyming before lunch took place. However, regarding its physical characteristics the room is a periphery site. It is big but it is not an integral part of the other spaces, like the smaller rooms. For example, it cannot be heated. As can be seen in Figure 4, the room was furnished with pieces of furniture, objects and toys evoking the Sámi landscape. In the picture we see a Sámi *lávvu* (a traditional tent), which was used actively as an intimate place. For example, reading sessions took place inside it. The veils and the covers on the desks have the colours of the Sámi flag and dresses. In front of the window there are two Sámi hats, a drum and pictures of animals typical of the North. All of these items contribute to the creation of an atmosphere which can be labelled as “traditional” Sámi.



Figure 4. The “Sámi land”.

In the interviews this physical space turned out to be the symbol of “authenticity”, the embodiment of “historicity” and a site of “exoticness” at the same time. The teachers of the Sámi group stressed that each object in the room was brought from the North, and by spending time in this authentic learning environment and playing with the toys (such as the symbolic sledge in Figure 5 or the more modern cooking devices in Figure 6) the children get the feeling of the “original” Sámi lifestyle. Contrarily, in a parental interview the room embodied historicity by providing information about an earlier life. For the other groups, who regularly visit this room, “Sámi land” is mainly a fascinating and exotic site for playing.



Figures 5 and 6. The toys in the “Sámi land”.

The Sámi culture was also present in the different thematic topics of the everyday activities. However, themes related to the Sámis are not overvalued according to the teacher: (Extract 14) *We want the children to gain positive experiences, therefore the topics should be interesting for them. For instance if they were interested in robots in spring, then we would discuss robots, even though they do not really relate to the Sámi culture (...). Because they learn the language while doing something interesting.*

Another important site was the courtyard of the kindergarten. It was the place where the Sámi group had the most contact with the other children. Here, during playing together both parties can experience the resources of multilingualism, as the teacher of the Sámi group formulated: (Extract 15) *We also do this on the courtyard, if there are Finnish speaking children and our children, and if we give some instructions we give them in Sámi and we ask the children to translate them. So that they*

use their bilingual competence. Another teacher of a Finnish group mentioned that through the presence of the Sámi group the children from the other groups can also experience different communicational situations.

The educators reported on earlier formal cooperation between the Finnish and the Sámi groups, too. For example, one of the Finnish groups visited the Sámi group to listen to their songs and rhymes. The teacher of the majority group summarized the experiences as follows: (Extract 16) *There were songs and rhymes and then she talked a little about them [the Sámi teacher about the songs]. It was very good, because this way it seemed to open up a little bit, at least the bigger children understood better that this is not like a division, they could see what kind of company they [the Sámi group] are.* The principal of the institution even added that meeting other cultures in the kindergarten could prepare the institution for the arrival of more children with a migration background:

Extract 17

They [the Sámi group] had their own Christmas and spring celebrations. But there are special days in the year – like the Sámi national day – that we celebrate together. We visit the Sámi land there, and most likely this year we will have a Sámi Christmas in some way, so that we can capitalize on their cultural heritage for others as well. I believe that this can help in the future to build bridges, if suddenly so many migrants were to arrive and children would come to us, too, it will make it easier I think to get acquainted with another cultures (...).

According to this extract the Sámi education in the kindergarten serves not only the demands of the particular Sámi group, but in case of cooperation between the educators also other children can capitalize on the cultural resources and this activity forms the attitudes of the whole institution positively toward diversity and cultural and linguistic differences.

6 Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to present an example of how the cognitive potential of both speakers of dominant and non-dominant languages can be maximized by capitalizing on linguistic and cultural diversity. We studied a kindergarten group which works in a majority kindergarten in Finland and offers full immersion program in the non-dominant Northern Sámi language. In the introduction of the paper we formulated three main research questions that we will answer here in the conclusion.

First we asked what the linguistic and pedagogical consequences of the broader social context of the examined activity are. Our main finding was that the group has to deal with diverse linguistic repertoires with respect to the children attending the group as well as their parents. Because the parents have different linguistic biographies, they all have different needs in connection with education in the non-dominant language. For example, a value difference between “native speaker competence” and “other language competence” could be identified according to the teacher of the group. Native speaker competence was valued as “full”, “authentic” knowledge, while the image of a “learnt” and therefore “incomplete” competence was related to the language nest. This ideological

contrast set up a challenge for the educators when they started to organize the language nest activity.

On the other hand, the flexibility of ideologies could be observed, too. The teacher who acquired the Sámi language at university was also regarded as competent by the members of the community just like the native educators (cf. Pasanen, 2015, p. 360). Furthermore, her Sámi language and cultural studies and her knowledge of language nest methodology made her the central figure in the group. This fact is an outcome of the broader social context of the activity examined: while on the one hand in the city context the Sámi environment and its speakers get overrated as ideal domains and partners of language acquisition, on the other hand, professional competence is able to offset the authenticity of particular physical sites.

Our second question was what kind of pedagogical practices are typical in the group in order to promote the culture and foster the linguistic development of the children within the city context. According to the analysis there are two main strategies of handling the tension which emerges from the linguistic and ideological differences of the participants. (1) We experienced very active cooperation between the institution and the families. The parents are regularly informed about the linguistic development of the children and they also get support on how they themselves can foster the children's competence in the non-dominant language at home. In some cases this results in the very positive step that the parents themselves start to learn the language. The family is also involved from time to time in the activities of the group. For example, family members who speak the language are invited to the kindergarten and spend some time with the children. (2) The cooperation with the parents and the broader family and community becomes both the prerequisite and the tool of creating a curriculum tailored to local needs (cf. McCarty & Nicholas, 2012, Sallabank, 2011). Cooperation makes the educators able to pay maximal attention to the local context, and it allows them to create an activity that motivates both the parents and the children for active participation. Motivation is secured on the one hand via equal participation: children can use any linguistic resources available for them. The educators looked at the crossover phenomena and the diversity of the linguistic resources rising during multilingual language practices as natural parts of language acquisition. To mention another positive example, the division into groups during everyday activities also happens according to the linguistic competencies of the children so that everybody feels in a safe atmosphere and has the chance to participate actively. On the other hand, children are motivated also via the playful activities through which they get acquainted with the Sámi culture and with the related special vocabulary.

To sum up, we can identify four important factors that can be crucial in any other educational setting involving non-dominant languages in ensuring the motivation of the participants, promoting the revitalization of an endangered language and helping to achieve multilingual competencies. These are *active cooperation*, *maximal consideration of the local context*, *flexibility of ideologies* toward fluid language practices, and a *broad repertoire of methods*.

Endnotes

- ¹ Supported by the project entitled *Languag-E-Chance: Development of language conscious school, bilingual deaf education and innovative methods and tools of knowledge exploitable by language* implemented by the Languag-E-Chance Educational Research Group of the Research Centre for Multilingualism of the Research Institute for Linguistics of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (SZ-007/2016, project leader: Csilla Bartha). The fieldwork was conducted by Borbála Pachné Heltai, supported by CIMO fellowship (RU-15-9723).
- ² More information (in Hungarian): <http://mta.hu/tantargy-pedagogiai-kutatasi-program/mta-nyti-nyelvesely-szakmodszertani-kutatocsoport-107237> (29.05.2017)
- ³ Marks in the interviews: (*text left out*); [*additional information*].
- ⁴ One of the children was not attending the kindergarten during the fieldwork.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. The interview extracts in Finnish

Extract 1

Tilastojen mukaan sanovat, että täällä on 600-700 saamelaista elikkä pitäisi olla helppo luoda saamenkielinen luokka. Mutta kun sitten taas ne ei, niitä, niitä taas ei näy. Että tässä on kymmenen lasta hoidossa ja mitä ne sitten sen jälkeen kun ne alkaa esikoulun ja sitten voi mennä ensimmäiselle luokalle, niin sitten ne saa pari tuntia viikossa kielenopetusta. Jos hyvin käy. (28-vuotias isä)

Extract 2

Sillä kotiseutualueella on melko hyvät edetykset elää saamelaisena. Mutta sitten kun, kun jos ihmisillä tuleekin sitten joku tarve, että pitää lähteä sieltä pois, niin silloin jäädään vähän ehkä enempi heitteille. Mutta kyllä se tota se riippuu myös siitä omasta suhtautumisesta, että myös se, kuinka haluaa itse nähdä vaivaa sen asian eteen. (...) Eilen mulle tuli, mä rupesin miettimään, että kun me tultiin aamulla tähän näin, (...) kotona me syötiin aamupalaa ja kuunneltiin hetken Saamen radiota, ja ajettiin tänne näin, tultiin saamenkieliseen päivähoitoon tuomaan lapset, juteltiin siinä hoitajan kanssa saameksi ja sitten mä menin yliopistolle ja siellä tavallaan on saamen kielen laitos ja siellä muut opiskelijat ja henkilökunta, niitten kanssa puhun saamea. Ja sitten mä hain lapset ja mennään kotiin ja just sattui tulemaan saamenkieliset uutiset telkkarista. Että no se on myös sitä tavallaan, että haluaako itse nähdä vaivaa. Kuinka paljon itse haluaa tehdä semmosien eteen. Että minusta olisi jotenkin kohtuutonta esimerkiksi vaatia sitä, että Oulun kaupungin täytyy järjestää mun lapsille saamenkielistä päivähoitoa ja kasvattaa ne saamenkieliseksi (...) Että me puhuttais kotona suomea ja se saamelaisuus ei olisi millään tapaa esillä. Niin minä en voi sillä tavalla niinku ulkoistaa sitä millekään muulle.

Extract 3

Ollaan perheille käännetty kirjoja. Että heillä on suomenkielisiä lastenkirjoja. Saamenkielisiä on vaikea saada. Ja ollaan sitten käännetty se teksti saameksi ja vanhemmat on voinut sitten siitä lukea. Ne osaa lausua saamea, eivät osaa itse vielä kääntää, mutta ovat voineet sitten lukea sitä valmista tekstiä. (...) No mitään materiaaleja ei ole riittävästi. Kyllä tarjotaan, mutta koko ajan pitää lisää itse tehdä ja kääntää. (...) Ja sitten ihan se, miten niitä hankitaan, että ne myydään Inarissa ja Norjan puolella. Niin se, että meidän pitää työntekijöiden lähteä käydä siellä. (...) Suomenkielisissä ryhmissä voi tilata niin kuin valmiiksi, kaikki löytyy Oulusta ja me joudutaan niinku käymään Inarissa (...) Heidänkin pitää tilata Norjasta osa. Aika semmonen monimutkainen. (27-vuotias nainen)

Extract 4

Juteltiin siitä, että aloitetaanko ja voidaanko toimia sillä tavalla, että tota äidinkieliiset ja kielipesälapset toimii samassa ryhmässä, koska sekin voi olla ongelmallista ihan sen takia, että kun myös äidinkielisille pitäis saada oikeus siihen äidinkielen tasoiseen saamen kielen kehittämiseen. Ja sitten jos on kielipesälapsi, että vasta opettelemassa kieltä, niin miten ne kummankin ryhmän oikeudet toteutuu? Voidaanko me tasapainoilla siinä välissä? Mutta nyt siihen sitten löydettiin ratkaisu, elikkä me jaetaan tätä ryhmää sen kielitaitotason mukaan. (...) Että me entistä enemmän jaetaan lapsia pienryhmiin.

Extract 5

Äidinkielisistä vahemmista muutama kyseli sitä, että miten heidän lastensa tavallaan kielelliset oikeudet sitten turvataan. Että heidän lapset ei opettelis sitä kieltä niinkuin vieraana kielenä, vaan saisi semmosta rikasta äidinkielistä kieltä kehittää.

Extract 6

A. A., joka on tota Oulun yliopiston saamen kielen professori on sanonut mun mielestä tosi hyvin sen, että kaupungeissa saamenkielisten lasten kielitaitoa ei voi jakaa mustavalkoisesti, että täällä päässä on äidinkieliä ja sitten täällä päässä on kielipesälapsia, ne on kaikkia siltä väliltä. (...) Ja sitä ollaan just vanhemmille selitetty, että ei jaeta niitä pienryhmiä sen mukaan, että tämä lapsi nyt on virallisesti kielipesälapsi, tämä on äidinkielen, vaan katotaan että miten se lapsi osaa sitä kieltä.

Extract 7

R. on ollut viime kevään U:lla asunut isän kanssa ja on kuullut sukulaisilta saamea, päiväkodissa saamea, joka paikassa saamea. Ja N. ja E. oli viime kesän pohjoisessa, Norjan puolella sellaisten sukulaisten luona, jotka ei puhu suomea, vaan pelkästään norjaa ja saamea. Ja heillä oli pakko puhua saamea. Nyt kun ne tuli tänne tänä syksynä, niin on kaikki ollut tosi saamenkielisiä. S. taas on ollut koko kesän täällä Oulussa suomenkielisessä ympäristössä.

Extract 8

On puhuttu, että on erilaisia saamen kieliä. Esim. meillä on hyllyssä, on saatu lahjoituksena kirjoja inarin- tai koltansaameksi ja ollaan katottu, että sanat on vähän eri näköisiä. Ja sitten osalla on semmosia tuttuja Pohjoisessa, jotka puhuu jompaakumpaa kieltä ja ollaan siitä puhuttu että eri kieliä.

Extract 9

Ne on kaikki itämurteen lapsia. (...) Mä toivoisin että tulisi joskus joku länsimurteen puhujakin. Sitten olisi vähän semmosta erilaista kieltä lapsille.

Extract 10

Tietenkin se olisi tärkeä, että hän on niinku kiinnostunut lapsesta yksilönä. Koska ne kaikki lapset ovat tietenkin erilaisia ja tulevat aika erilaisista lähtökohdista ja kielen tasot on niinku erilaisia. Että on sillä lailla kiinnostunut ja ottaa huomioon sen taustan ja lapsen lähtökohdat, kykenee sitten työskentelemään lasten lähtökohdista sen kielen kanssa. Se on aika vaativaa minun mielestä. (41-vuotias äiti)

Extract 11

Mehän sitten puhutaan taas Oulun murretta lapsille. Ainakin minä puhun kovasti sitä Oulun murretta ja ihan tarkoituksenmukaisestikin olen sitä puhunut, että koska se on sitä omaa, etten oo lähtenyt sitä millään tavalla muuttaa. (...) Että minun mielestä ainakin sekini on niin osa oululaisuutta ja osa "Minä oululaisena" ajatusta.

Extract 12

Että toisaalta tässä on huonoja puolia se, että suomen kieltä kuulee, että ei voi tehdä sellaista kokonaan saamenkielistä ympäristöä (...). Mutta toisaalta on hyvänä puolena, että me ollaan täällä. Meillä työntekijöillä on ammatillista tukea tosi paljon, jos tulee lasten kanssa joku ongelmatilanne niin saadaan apua. Sitten toisaalta ihan materiaalit verrattuna muihin kielipesiin. Se rahoitus, jonka kielipesät saa, on aika pieni, niin ne joutuu niillä pienellä rahoituksella ostaa kaikki lelut ja askartelutarvikkeet ja kaikki. Ja meillä sitten taas miettii, kuinka paljon on leluja tässä päiväkodissa ja me saadaan hirveästi niinku lisää sanastoa lapsille ihan sillä, että me vaihdetaan niitä leluja, tuodaan jostakin toisesta osastolta erilaisia leluja tänne.

Extract 13

Siinä oli se sama ajatus, että tehdään sitä vähemmistökieltä näkyväksi, että muutenkin ottaa sen huomioon. Että lapsille tulisi semmonen olo, että kielellä on arvo. Että sitä voi käyttää muutkin. Että se ei ole mikään pikkuporukan juttu, vaan se on koko päiväkodin asia.

Extract 14

Halutaan lapsille niitä positiivisia kokemuksia, niin teemojen pitää olla semmosia, joista lapset on kiinnostuneet. Jos ne olisi nyt keväällä hirveän kiinnostuneita roboteista, sitten me otettais roboottiteema, vaikka se ei liity saamelaiskulttuuriin mitenkään (...). Koska sen hauskan tekemisen kautta ne oppii sitä kieltä.

Extract 15

Me tehdään myös pihalla, jos meillä on suomenkielisiä lapsia ja meidän lapsia, niin annetaan ohjeet johonkin, niin annetaan saameksi ja pyydetään lapset, että ne kääntää. Eli käyttää kaksikielistä osaamista.

Extract 16

Siellä oli lauluja ja loruja ja sitten oli ihan niinku ne kertoo siinä vähän semmosta. Mitä oli tosi kivaa, että se vähän avasi ainakin niille isommille ja ne ymmärsi enemmän, että eikä semmosta jakoa, että mitä porukkaa tämä nyt on ja semmosta.

Extract 17

Heillä oli omat joulujuhlat ja kevätjuhlat nyttien. Mutta sitten aina on tiettyjä hetkiä vuodessa kuten saamelaisten oma kansallispäivä, silloin vietetään me yhteisesti sitä. Me vierailaan tuolla Saamenmaassa ja todennäköisesti tämän joulun aikaan vietetään saamelaista joulua jossakin muodossa, että otetaan se kulttuuriperintö myös muille käyttöön. Mä uskon, että se helpottaa sitä siltaa siihen, että yhtäkkiä tulee niitä pakolaisia niin paljon, että lapsia tulee meillekin tänne näin, kyllä se helpottaa sitten sitä toisiin kulttuureihin perehtymistä (...).

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