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A Descriptive Study of Early Childhood Education Steering Documents in Finland, Sweden and Australia around Language Immersion Programmes

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Abstract

Being able to speak different languages is important in today's global world to allow communication and understanding. Countries may vary in how they support early language learning with immersion programmes. This paper specifically explores the steering documents in Finland, Sweden, and Australia for children attending early childhood education settings (children aged birth to five years). A content analysis was used to explore patterns. The descriptive comparison allows similarities and differences across the countries to emerge. As a result, a table describing the different immersion and monolingual approaches in respective country is presented. The paper concludes with a broader discussion on steering documents in early childhood education in regards to young children's rights to learning languages and attending different immersion programmes within early childhood.

Keywords: language immersion, policy, comparison

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Introduction

Bilingualism and multilingualism are an important capital in the globalized world. The formal education provides one opportunity for children to learn languages. How languages are introduced to children, however, varies across the world, dependent on the language ideology of the country (García, 2009). For example, some children learn languages only in school or early childhood contexts while others grow up in bicultural or multicultural environments.

In education steering documents, countries describe a child's access to their native language as well as different possibilities to learning other languages. In many countries, a monolingual approach is a primarily basis, where the goal is a language shift. In these contexts, minority language students are placed in the mainstream classroom with no support and expected to 'sink or swim' within the new language (Baker, 2011). Sheltered language classes are another option for monolingually oriented education where minority students are placed in classes in which everyone is learning the language (Baker, 2011; García, 2009). Different combinations of these approaches are present in schools across the world. Alternatives to monolingual approaches are dual immersion models where both minority and the majority languages alternate as the language of instruction (Baker, 2011). In this approach, in early childhood education, instruction is often monolingual during the first years (child's L2 language) while the child's L1 language is introduced afterwards as an instruction language (Harju-Luukkainen, 2013).

How to define different monolingual and immersion models is somewhat problematic. According to Baker (2011), language immersion should be seen as an umbrella term and the term language immersion is used differently in different countries (Harju-Luukkainen, 2013). The Immersion models are sometimes mixed, for example, in the United States with monolingual education, where the children are not supported in their primary language. Here the goal is the opposite of immersion programmes to learn quickly the majority language and suppress ones primary language. In these type of monolingual models, the language minority groups often perform poorly on than would be expected when taking into consideration these student's socio-economical background (Harju-Luukkainen & Hellgren, 2013). Other negative effects have also been reported, for example, in children's relationship between them and their parents as well as grandparents (Nicolas & Lightbrown,

2008). This type of child's insufficient development or even lose of the mother tongue is often described with terms "subtractive bilingualism" (Lambert, 1980, p. 57) or "semilingualism" (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1981, p. 250).

Different language immersion programmes can be roughly categorized according to (1) when the children start in the programme and (2) how much immersion children receive in their preschool or school setting (Baker, 2011). With this categorization, different programmes can be observed in early childhood education. Early total immersion can be seen as the most popular and most effective immersion programme for example in Finland (Baker, 2011; Laurén, 2000). During this type of immersion education, the entire early education is provided with some foreign language (Harju-Luukkainen, 2013). The second type of immersion programme can be called as an early partial immersion. In this type of immersion programme, the children are introduced to a second language during their early education years. Here the children are introduced to both L1 and L2 language during their early years.

In this study, we take a closer look at the national curriculum provided for children to learn languages during early childhood education (birth to five years of age). The research question is as follows: What does the national curriculum tell us about language learning in Finland, Sweden, and Australia?

In Finland, Sweden, and Australia, the national curriculum for early childhood education is used as data. In Australia, the enactment of the curriculum may also have further curriculum or details from the state or territory. This is because of the size and organization within Australia. As such, the state of Victoria has been chosen in Australia for analysis. The state of Victoria was chosen because of its' specific focus on different languages, given the diverse needs of the population who speak a language other than English. Different immersion programmes and views on language learning in early years are described and discussed. Finland, Sweden, and Australia were chosen because of the familiarity of context and culture to the authors. Within the literature, only few studies have compared across borders in comparative research. This study helps to fill this voidance by providing a descriptive summary of steering documents towards immersion programmes in these three countries.

Early Immersion in Languages

Early total immersion was developed in 1960's in St. Lamberts in Canada. In the immersion program, English speaking children (L1) received all instruction in French (L2) from early childhood education to end of grade two. The goal of the immersion was that children attending would learn an immersion language (L2) on a functional level. This principle has influenced many other immersion programmes around the world (Genesee, 1987; Harju-Luukkainen, 2013; Lambert & Tucker, 1972). However, it is important to remember that, according to Harju-Luukkainen (2013), children's proficiency in the immersion language (L2) is dependent on the amount of instruction received in the immersion language.

The first children attending total early immersion programmes were followed with several assessments. When it comes to linguistic outcome, the immersion children demonstrated same levels of proficiency in listening and speaking in their L1 as their English speaking peers. Immersion students reached also the same proficiency level in all aspects of French as a second language that was superior to that of English-speaking students who had received regular language instruction for short periods each day (D'Angelajan & Tucker, 1971; Genesee, 2004). Similar findings have been reported in other countries as well. In Finland, early language immersion started in the 1980's. In a longitudinal study conducted to 133 children, the children's language skills developed as expected (Harju-Luukkainen, 2013). In each assessment, children showed weaker skills in their immersion language (L2) than in their mother tongue (L1). In the field of language command, the children performed excellent in both languages. However, in the immersion language (L2), children's naming ability did not reach to the same level as native speakers. Also, according to Savijärvi (2011), immersion children in Finland were developing in their L2 language fast and the teachers' actions were largely understood by the children even at the beginning of the immersion. In Estonia, early language immersion programmes started in year 2000. Even though the program was considered successful, children readiness for school was still questioned. A three-year study was conducted by Kukk, Õunb, and Ugasteb (2014) and the results indicated that readiness for school of the children having completed the early language immersion programme was very good.

Immersion in languages early in life seems to be beneficial for a child. This is due to

how language develops in the early years and what can be referred to as a sensitive period (Werker & Tees, 2005). The benefits of learning a second language early have to do with the fact that neural connections are developing in early infancy to detect phonetic patterns in speech (Kuhl, 2004). These neural connections are designed to maximize the ability of the infant to learn speech and to communicate with others. Research has indicated that phonetic learning occurs prior to the end of the first year of life, but continues to eight years of age (Ferguson, Menn, & Stoel-Gammon, 1992) and syntactic learning is heightened between 18 and 36 months of age and continues, but declines after 7 years of age (Johnson & Newport, 1989).

Even though different immersion programmes have been found to be effective and beneficial in general, according to Nicolas and Lightbown (2008), the process of second language development is a fragile one. It should not be assumed that it will be automatically successful. And when a language appears to have been mastered, it can be lost without sustained support. According to Harju-Luukkainen (2013), there are still challenges with immersion programmes. One challenge seems to be that children progress in the immersion language in different phases. The older the children were in early childhood context, the more differentiated the results were in the immersion language. We have also very little information on how children with learning challenges develop in immersion context (Bergström, 2002). This produces a challenge for the immersion education when it comes to ensuring educational equality and equity.

Method

Qualitative research involves purposeful use of describing, explaining and interpreting collected data (Williams, 2007). In this study, we have engaged with content analysis. Leedy and Ormrod (2001) describe this as “a detailed and systematic examination of the content of a particular body of materials for the purpose of identifying patterns, themes or biases” (p. 155). “The method is designed to identify specific characteristics from the content” (Williams, 2007, p. 69). In this study, the content is the steering documents.

The steering documents from the three countries were collected and analysed by the research team. The research team was interested in exploring any description about

language learning or immersion programmes. Initial searches were done for "chunks of meaning" within the documents around language for the first stage of the content analysis. The identified material was discussed and shared. A final description for each country was then created before similarities and differences were identified across the descriptions.

According to Leedy and Ormrod (2001), this approach leads to the highest level of objective analysis as the identification of material can be studies and discussed, allowing the quality examined to be mutually agreed upon. The approach also leads to trustworthiness of descriptions as patterns, themes, and biases are discussed within the research team. In the final phase, a table describing the different immersion and monolingual approaches in respective country is produced.

Results

Finland

All children under school-age have a subjective right to Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) in Finland regardless of their linguistic or other background (Finnish Ministry of Justice, 1999, 2015). The municipals are responsible for organizing the ECEC service for families. ECEC is primarily organized by day-care centres and in family day-care.

At national level, ECEC is a responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Culture and the national expert agency for ECEC is Finnish National Board of Education. There are international, national, and local policy documents governing early childhood education and care in Finland. On the international level, the guidelines are European Commission (1996), the United Nations (1989, 2006), and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (1994). On the highest national level, ECEC is guided by Finnish Ministry of Justice (1999) and the newly revised Finnish Ministry of Justice (2015). Further, the content of ECEC is guided by the national curriculum for early childhood education (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2016). Naturally, also other Acts and policy documents are guiding the work in ECEC settings, but with a smaller impact.

Curriculum for early childhood education Finland. Finland is a bilingual country by its constitution, which are Finnish and Swedish. The Swedish speakers form the minority, constituting approximately 5 percent of the whole population in Finland. The majority of the population, approximately 90 percent, are registered as Finnish speakers. Rest of the population speaks other languages. The long history of two language groups living side by side in the nation with equal rights from the child care up to university level in education has had its consequences on the Finnish steering documents. Forming it towards a more language orientated than in many other countries.

In Finland, Finnish National Agency for Education (2016) makes it possible for children to attend into three different types of immersion programmes. The first one is called Early Language Immersion in the national languages (Finnish, Swedish, or Sami). This program was introduced in Finland in the early 1990's. Nowadays, approximately 4,500 children attend either in Swedish or in Finnish immersion programmes yearly. The amount of children attending immersion has been predicted to grow during the forthcoming years (Kangasvieri, Miettinen, Palviainen, Saarinen, & Ala-Vähälä, 2012). Children usually start at the early immersion programme around the age of three or later and they continue in the program until the end of their compulsory education. The entire personnel speak only one language for the children, which means that one language one person principle is used in this program. Also, the immersion language is mostly used in early childhood. The program is designed so that children will receive the support they need in their immersion language development as well as in the mother tongue. The mother tongue development is coordinated with the guardians. The second type of immersion is called Early Language Immersion in other languages. In these programmes, the immersion language is often another European languages like English, Spanish, German, or French, but the pedagogy is often similar to early immersion in national languages. According to Harju-Luukkainen (2013), it is difficult to make a distinction between the different programmes in Finland when looking at their pedagogy. However, according to Finnish National Agency for Education (2016), most of the education time in early langue immersion programmes should be in the immersion language. The third option for early childhood education is called Early Partial Immersion. In this type of programme, the language taught to children can be any foreign or national language which is not the primarily language of the early

childhood education setting. The language lessons or stimulation moments need to be continuous and frequent, but less than 25 percent of the education time. There are no pedagogical guidelines on how to organize the education. However, the goal for this type of education is to support and motivate children in their language learning and to broaden the language choices of the children (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2016). Also, another type of immersion program is possible in Finland, which is a type of a language revitalization immersion programme. This revitalization program is possible for children speaking a minority indigenous endangered language. Here the principles of education follow the principles of the different language immersion programmes.

Even though many children attend yearly in the different type of Immersion, CLIL, or language enriched teaching-programmes, it is important to notice that attending any kind of program is obligatory for children in Finland. This means that parents can choose, if they like, a language program for their child. Even though the different immersion programmes are organized throughout the entire country, they are not evenly spread. Most of the immersion programmes can be found in the costal bilingual areas of Finland (Miettinen, Kangasvieri, & Saarinen, 2013). This also means that different immersion programmes are not yet available for all families and children in Finland. According to Bergroth and Björklund (2013), approximately 4,500 children are attending yearly in the different immersion programmes. However, the need for different language programmes in municipalities in Finland is growing and the amount of programmes are expected to grow in the future (Miettinen et al., 2013). In Finland, there are no steering documents stating how the immersion language should be delivered. However, there is research on best practices and the description on immersion didactics in Finnish context (Harju-Luukkainen, 2013).

Also, children with other linguistic background other than national languages are supported in the Finnish ECEC in their language development. According to Finnish National Agency for Education (2016), children that speak other languages are supported in their language development (Swedish/Finnish), the development of their cultural identity as well as their self-esteem. However, the responsibility to support the development of child's native language or languages as well as cultural identity is the family's role.

Sweden

Sweden has two official languages including Swedish and Swedish Sign Language. In Sweden, eight percent of the population is foreign citizens and 17 percent of the population is foreign born (Statistics Sweden, 2016). Moreover, the number of immigrants has increased in the recent years. In 2015, there were 134,240 immigrants and 126,966 in 2014 (Statistics Sweden, 2016). This has resulted in a number of children with a mother tongue other than Swedish in preschool. During 2010-2011 school years, 20 percent of children had another language than Swedish as their mother tongue (Statistics Sweden, 2016). Of the other languages, the most common language was Arabic with 33,000 students.

Preschool in Sweden encompasses schooling from one to five years of age. Attendance at preschool is free of charge from three to five years of age for 525 hours a year. In the beginning of the 1990s, a voucher system was introduced. This gave parents the flexibility to choose between different preschools.

Two steering documents which describe education for preschools and schools exist in Sweden. The first document is the curriculum for preschools and the second is the Educational Acts. There is no documentation on immersion programmes in Sweden, but the curriculum emphasizes language development of the child. The Swedish curriculum for preschool emphasizes stimulating each child's language development and encourages taking advantage of the child's curiosity and interest in the written language world. It goes on to address children with non-Swedish native languages. The curriculum acknowledges the development of their native language and how it may increase the opportunities to learn Swedish and also develop skills in other areas (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2010). The child’s native language is important for learning and knowledge acquisition before their Swedish reaches a level which enables this to occur.

In order to develop the child’s native language, Swedish Government (2010) outlines educational opportunities for children to learn their mother tongue. It states that a student who has a guardian with a native language other than Swedish should be offered mother tongue tuition in the language of:

1. Language is the student's daily interaction in the home.
2. The student has basic knowledge of the language.

However, this instruction is not offered until the child is in the first class of school. Preschools can support the child's native language in different ways. Consequently, this is dependent on the staff's linguistic level of the child's native language (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2013).

Steering documents for early immersion childhood education in Sweden. In Sweden, language immersion programmes for preschool-aged children can be thought of in two ways. The first program focuses on children with Swedish (majority) as a native language being immersed in an additional language (minority). The second program focuses on a child with native language (minority) other than Swedish immersed in Swedish (majority). The Swedish National Agency for Education (2013) lists three types of preschools: (1) the preschool institution is multilingual with a clear bilingual or trilingual profile (early total immersion); (2) the preschool is Swedish at the institutional level, but multilingual at the individual level where some staff are multilingual and use more than one language in communication with the children with which they share site (early partial immersion); and (3) the preschool is Swedish at the institutional level, but multilingual at the individual level where some or all of the kids speak Swedish mother tongue and possibly other languages while staff only speak Swedish (monolingual education).

The preschool institution which is multilingual can be seen as an immersion program of a minority language. These programmes focus on the development of one or two minority languages and are rare. They often exist in the larger cities (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2013). The focus of these programmes has been mainly on English as the additional language. However, there is one preschool which offers Spanish and English instruction (Björk-Willén, 2008). These preschools follow the Swedish National Agency for Education (2010).

The other two types of preschool offer Swedish as the language of instruction. This can be considered an immersion program for children who do not have Swedish as their mother tongue. This is of particular interest with the number of refugees and immigrant children in Sweden today. A research study has investigated one immersion classroom for refugee and immigrant children aged 7 to 10 years (Cekaite & Aronsson, 2005). There is currently limited literature investigating the educational outcomes of preschool aged children

attending this type of immersion program in Sweden. Recent research has focused on the delivery of instruction within the program.

Currently, there are no policies which dictate how language immersion is delivered. For those programmes with additional languages offered to Swedish speaking children, a partial immersion program where Swedish is still used in instruction is often offered (Björk-Willén, 2008). For children attending a Swedish immersion program or preschool, the Swedish National Agency for Education (2013) advises children should be treated as an asset for their bilingualism. The Swedish National Agency for Education (2013) does include aspects in their curriculum which focuses on the idea of learning language. These include creating and communicating by means of various forms of expression such as art, song and music, drama, rhythm, dance and movement as well as with the help of speech and written language is both content and method of pre-school efforts to promote children's development and teaching (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2010). The curriculum also highlights the idea of context of learning rather than the form. It states that children should get stimulation and guidance from adults to, through their own activity, increase their skills and acquire new knowledge and insights. This approach assumes that different languages, forms of knowledge, and ways of learning balance and form a whole. Furthermore, the curriculum for Swedish preschools states that children should develop a nuanced speech, vocabulary and concepts, and their ability to play with words, tell, express ideas, ask questions, argue, and communicate with others (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2010).

There is support for teachers who work within an immersion program in Sweden. Research has highlighted different ways to enhance additional language learning. All teachers have agreed bilingualism is beneficial and recognized there should be a balance between the mother tongue and Swedish as it aids in self-identify (Mohamed & Medhammar, 2014). In Swedish speaking preschools, teachers have demonstrated different methods to promote learning Swedish. They sang songs, read books, danced to music, and guided play experiences (Cekaite & Aronsson, 2005; Mohamed & Medhammar, 2014). More recently, some of the teachers also utilized iPads, audio books, and YouTube (Mohamed & Medhammar, 2014). In English and Spanish focused programmes, routine organization of language has aided in learning an additional language. An example of a

routine would be taking attendance during sharing time (Björk-Willén, 2008).

When considering the second form of language immersion, it is important to examine the access to this program. Although it is voluntary to attend preschool, approximately 50 percent of children begin preschool between 1 and 2 years of age while approximately 85 percent begin between 2 and 3 years of age. By 4 years of age, 90 percent of children in Sweden attend a preschool (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2013). Local municipalities are required to offer places in preschools if the children's parents are studying or working. A child is entitled to a place at a preschool if the child's parents are unemployed or on parental leave, however, at a reduced number of hours. The number of hours varies by municipality with a minimum of 525 hours per year (15 hours per week).

Australia

While Australia has no official language, it is largely monolingual with English the dominant language. Australian English also has a distinctive vocabulary and accent. According to the 2011 national Australian census (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2011), 76.8 percent of people spoke English at home. Other languages spoken at home included Mandarin (1.6%), Italian (1.4%), Arabic (103%), Cantonese (1.2%), and Greek (1.2%). A number of first and second generation immigrants are bilingual.

As a federation, Australia consists of states and territories. Each state and territory has their own responsibility for education, policing, and health care. In this study, the state of Victoria was chosen. Victoria is the second largest state with 6 million people (ABS, 2011). Around 23 percent of people speak a language other than English at home (ABS, 2011). The most spoken languages other than English were Italian (124,857), Greek (116,825), and Mandarin (103,793).

In Australia, children can attend early childhood service from birth to five years of age. Children start compulsory school at five years of age. Since children in Australia start school earlier than children in Finland and Sweden (who start school at age seven), both early childhood steering documents and state education documents are reviewed.

In the state of Victoria, Australia, the framework document called the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF) is used for children aged birth to 8 years. VEYLDF also draws upon the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the

Child and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. There are five learning and development outcomes for children and practice principles for early childhood professionals. As part of the goals for Equity and Diversity, early childhood professionals are expected to "recognize multiculturalism as an asset and support children to maintain their first language, learn English as an additional language, and learn languages other than English" (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority [VCAA], 2016, p. 12). Within the first outcome of children having a strong sense of identity, it is stated as follows (VCAA, 2016):

> The acquisition and maintenance of first or home languages has a significant and continuing role in the construction of identity. This is supported when early childhood professionals respect children's cultures and languages. In Victoria the rich array of languages and cultures enable many opportunities for valuing and strengthening multilingual capabilities, respecting cultural diversity, supporting common values and building social cohesion (p. 18).

Outcome five also relates to supporting children's language development by focusing on communication. It is acknowledged that families in Victoria are diverse and early childhood professionals need to support additional languages. The framework states as follows (VCAA, 2016):

> Victorian families and the communities in which children live are diverse. Maintenance of first language is important for children's identity, wellbeing, communication and learning. Children can successfully learn English (or another language) as an additional language through exposure to the language, explicit modelling and language teaching, and appropriate time to acquire the new language. Children benefit when early childhood professionals have knowledge about the acquisition and application of an additional language and how this can vary. It is especially important for early childhood professionals to be knowledgeable about the ways children learn additional languages. This includes awareness of the stages of acquisition and recognition that children differ in their rate of acquisition and application of language (p. 22).

The framework, however, only talks about children learning a range of languages when they enter a school setting. The framework acknowledges that, for some children, they will have the opportunity to continue their first language while, for other children, they will be learning a new language. Every school in Victoria is required by the legislation to provide foreign language instruction (Victorian Government, 2006). The Victorian Education

Department endorses 700 hours of language study before Year 7 (around 150 minutes of language study per week in primary school).

Steering documents for early immersion childhood education in Australia, Victoria. In Australia, immersion programmes began to emerge in the 1980s. The idea was copied from the well-known French immersion program that was introduced to Australia by a teacher of French in 1985 (Smala, 2012). Most programmes have been available for high school children, where some subjects have been studied in the new language and some subjects have been studied in English. In the state of Victoria, the term used is "bilingual education". In the Victorian government school system, one special school and eleven primary schools currently offer designated bilingual programmes which provide students with the opportunity to learn curriculum content in and through both English and another language. These programmes are all partial immersion programmes. Schools participating in the designated bilingual programmes are expected to provide (Victoria Education and Training, 2014, p. 1):

- content-based teaching in the target language using teachers who have appropriate teaching qualifications
- content-based teaching in two or more of the domains within the Discipline-based Learning Strand of the Australian Victorian Essential Learning Standards (AusVELS). Schools may choose from Science, Mathematics, The Arts and The Humanities
- face-to-face teaching in and through, the target language for a minimum of 5 hours per week to each target group in addition to the minimum of 2.5 hours per week for languages transition arrangements with the neighbouring secondary school/s to provide the exiting primary students with the opportunity to continue their language learning at an appropriate level opportunities to share their materials and teaching strategies with other languages teachers and for supervised teaching practice for trainee languages teachers

For the early childhood sector, there are a handful of private immersion early childhood services across Victoria. These early childhood services are within the private market and paid for by parents. Their focus is on education enhancement by allowing children access to learning environments where multiple languages are spoken. Common immersion languages in early childhood services include Mandarin, German, Japanese, and French.

The educators are bilingual and cater programmes for a child's individual need.

Looking across the Countries

In this paper, we have outlined different language learning opportunities in early childhood education in Finland, Sweden, and Australia (Victoria) by exploring relevant steering documents. Across the countries, we can see different approaches for language development (see Table 1). Australia and Sweden could be considered similar with many of the same approaches. Neither country provided a program for total immersion of national languages like in Finland. This is most likely due to the fact that Finland is a bilingual country by the constitution, where both languages have had a strong history and representation.

Table 1. *Different Immersion and Monolingual Early Childhood Programmes in Finland, Sweden, and Australia*

Type	Finland	Sweden	Australia, Victoria
National Languages	Finish, Swedish	Swedish	English
Immersion Education	1. Early total immersion in national languages	1. Early total multilingual immersion education	1. Early total multilingual immersion education
	2. Early total immersion in foreign languages	2. Early partial multilingual immersion education	2. Early partial multilingual immersion education
	3. Early partial immersion or multilingual education		
	4. Language revitalization programmes for national minority languages in risk of extinction		
Monolingual Education	Monolingual education for children speaking other languages than national ones with no support in children's native language	Monolingual education for children speaking other languages than national with no support in children's native language	Monolingual education for children speaking other languages than national with no support for children's native language

Discussion

In Finland, three different types of immersion education programmes are possible as well as a language revitalisation program for indigenous languages. The different programmes were also clearly described in the steering documents. However, there were no guidelines on the pedagogical principles or other steering documents around the didactics of the language education. Immersion programmes were also not available for all students. Children who did not speak the national language as their primary language did not have the opportunity to attend different immersion programmes. In Finland, children were not supported with their mother tongue. This type of monolingual education can be described as 'sink or swim' programmes (Baker, 2011). In these types of monolingual models, the language minority groups also often perform poorly (Harju-Luukkainen & Hellgren, 2013), which gives a base for inequality in the educational system. This is a problematic situation, especially, when the Finnish education system strives for equality (Harju-Luukkainen, Vettenranta, Ouakrim-Soivio, & Bernelius, 2016).

While Sweden shares a border with Finland, the approach to language learning is very different. In Sweden, there are two different types of immersion education programmes in early childhood: early total and early partial programmes. However, the description of these programmes was poor and non-informative as these are more descriptions of early education that occurs verses programmes that have been created. For example, the early partial programme exists due to a substantial increase in the number of immigrants in the recent years. The majority language of Swedish is spoken and the minority languages are dependent on the teachers' knowledge of those languages. If the teachers' do not have knowledge of other languages, then monolingual education is delivered. Native language training is not offered until the child enters school. Here also, as in Finland, no support is given in children's native languages. There appears not to be any focus in the steering documents on policy on early immersion. Perhaps, this could be the traditional focus on play where immersion may be interpreted as a type of intentional teaching and formal learning. In Sweden, the language ideology is that children are provided with some support for their mother tongue; however, Swedish is the primary language of instructions.

Similar to Sweden, Australia also has the two types of immersion programmes identified in Sweden. The foreign language for immersion was based on the languages that the

educator spoke. The immersion programmes were also not universal and available for all children. Rather, they were based within a selective handful of private early childhood services. This means that immersion programmes would be a choice of a family for a child to attend. In the early years of primary school, however, there are some public schools available that offer partial immersion programmes. In Australia, limited support is given to the development of mother tongue in terms of language development. While VEYLDF acknowledges that children speak different languages, it also suggests support for mother tongue language is dependent on the educator having a working understanding of different languages.

In Australia, it is surprising that limited immersion programmes were available, especially when 24 percent of the population in the state of Victoria speaks another language at home besides English. One explanation could be the dominance of English as the de facto language in Australia. Mother tongue language could be considered the role of the family while English is the responsibility of early childhood services and schools. The language ideology is that children are provided with opportunities to learn other languages when they are in the compulsory years of schooling. What point for consideration across all of the countries is the alignment of immersion programmes as children transition from early childhood services to primary school services.

The difference in educational provision across the countries shows the diversity based on country ideology. Given the population movements across the world, a reflection on language learning and immersion programmes is needed. Important questions are raised about what the most inclusive approach to support all children with language learning is. Should policy support all children to learn languages, including their mother tongue? Since children can rapidly learn languages during the early childhood phase, should more time be devoted to immersion programmes in early childhood services? Consideration should also be given to country differences as all countries attempt to support global citizenship and encourage acceptance of diversity. In these countries, what role does language play in supporting these goals? Should all children have a right to learn other languages or learn in their mother tongue language? Considerations can also be made about who provides language immersion programmes. Should they be provided by within the public or private sector?

Conclusion

What is clear from the descriptions in this study is that further details are needed within steering documents. The purpose of the programmes needs to be discussed as well as clear plans and guidelines about how to support bilingual and multi-lingual development during early childhood and the primary years of schooling. This paper provides some considerations for initial discussions and reflections.

The study is limited in that only three countries were reviewed. The study is also limited in that it provided a "snapshot" of content for review in the descriptive analysis. It is unclear if other countries would be similar of different to those represented in the paper. What is clear is that future research is needed within the field of early childhood education immersion programmes, including comparative studies and quantitative studies on the outcomes of children involved.

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