

## Cooperation Between Home and School in a Multilingual and Multicultural Everyday Context – NOTES IN ENGLISH

### Cooperation between Home and School in a Multilingual and Multicultural Everyday Context – Presentation of the Study and Development Proposals

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### Good Practices from Other Nordic Countries

Sweden: Skolverket / The Swedish National Agency for Education

Norway: Utdanningsdirektoratet / The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training

Iceland: Mennta- og barnamálaráðuneyti / Ministry of Education and Children

Denmark: No response

### Sweden

*Experts who responded to the questions: Jilda Semb Sürüp & Inger Bergendorff, Education Advisers, Swedish National Agency for Education (Skolverket)*

- Targeted measures: teacher education, language-aware teaching, etc.
- Newly arrived students receive special support during their first four years
- Cooperation between school and guardians is central
- Municipalities organise multilingual events and family programmes
- Cooperation between schools, municipalities and organisations strengthens families
- Examples: A Good Start in Life, School as an Arena, Building Bridges
- Organisations such as the Red Cross support language development and integration
- Inclusive key principles:
  - language-aware and culturally sensitive teaching
  - early and intensive support measures
  - shared responsibility for students
  - strong cooperation between home and school
  - Goal: equal opportunities for learning and a sense of belonging in the school community

## **Norway**

*Experts who responded to the questions: Are Solstad & Mari-Louise Pabsdorff, Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training*

- In Norway, the school's active role in home–school cooperation is emphasised
- The aim is to lower the threshold for participation and strengthen family engagement
- Schools appoint a home–school contact person to support multilingual families
- The contact person clarifies routines, participates in meetings and helps build trust
- Some schools organise language workshops for guardians
- The workshops support integration and facilitate participation in everyday school life
- Authorities provide guidelines and resources for teaching students with immigrant backgrounds and minority languages
- A free digital assessment tool is used to evaluate proficiency in Norwegian
- FUG supports guardians and strengthens dialogue between home and school at the national level
- NAFO provides support, materials and bilingual online education (e.g. Flexible Learning)
- Goal: learning support + increased family participation + a lower threshold for engagement

## **Iceland**

*Expert who responded to the questions: Fríða Bjarney Jónsdóttir, Ministry of Education and Children, Iceland*

- Cooperation with guardians is important throughout the educational path of multilingual children
- Practices vary between schools and municipalities
- Lack of a shared language creates challenges in communication
- Interpreters and families' home languages are important strategies
- There are significant differences in guardians' level of participation
- Participation is supported through interpretation and regular meetings
- Cooperation should be viewed as a continuous process, not as isolated activities
- Parents' linguistic and cultural competence is utilised as a resource
- New initiatives and projects are underway
- The MEMM project (2024–2026): education, participation and culture
- Objectives: common practices, support, materials and evaluation

- Focus areas: multilingualism, Icelandic as a second language, and cooperation with guardians
- Examples: reception sessions, information meetings and “bridge-builders”
- Cooperation between schools, municipalities and civil society
- Families are assigned a contact person and clear communication channels are established

## **Fellaskóli**

- Helgi Gíslason, Principal of Fellaskóli, Iceland
- Approximately 360 students
- 85% are multilingual
- Largest language groups: Polish, Tagalog and Arabic
- For many students, Icelandic poses a barrier to learning
- Close cooperation with preschools
- Support for leisure activities and practical matters
- The municipality employs multilingual staff
- Information provided in several languages, with childcare and meals offered at events
- Challenge: guardians’ participation in association activities
- In 2024, an Arabic-speaking teacher was hired as a bridge-builder
- The importance of reading and shared reading at home is emphasised

## **Denmark**

*Experts who responded to the questions: emu.dk*

- EMU is the Danish Ministry of Education’s learning portal
- It provides materials, research, guidelines and tools
- Purpose: to support high-quality teaching
- Focus on cultural mediators and clear communication
- The aim is to build trust between home and school
- Cultural mediators support both teachers and guardians
- They help prevent misunderstandings and increase mutual understanding
- Teachers conduct home visits
- Informal coffee meetings lower the threshold for cooperation

## **Three Key Messages**

### **Relationships before structures**

Effective cooperation between home and school is built primarily on trustful dialogue, strong relationships and accessible communication – not on individual projects.

### **Multilingualism is a resource**

When schools recognise and make use of families' languages and cultural competence, participation, learning and a sense of belonging are strengthened.

### **Small actions make a big difference**

Contact persons, cultural mediators and low-threshold approaches can significantly improve families' opportunities to participate and feel part of the school community.

## **Interviews with Guardians – Thematic Observations and Recommendations**

### **Guardians' experiences of cooperation between home and school**

- 30 guardians with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds were interviewed
- Key themes and development needs were identified

### **Experiences of reception and families' integration into school**

- A welcoming but varying reception
- Teacher continuity and early contact are important
- A need for more information about the Finnish education system
- Multilingual communication and dialogue with guardians are essential
- The use of contact persons and cultural mediators supports cooperation

### **Development recommendations**

- Establish a permanent multilingual orientation model for guardians (information about the education system, meeting the teacher, guardians' visits to the child's school, a designated contact person, Wilma and other communication channels)
- Ensure teacher continuity and allocate sufficient resources for preparatory education and language support
- Make use of cultural mediators and develop a multilingual guide to the education system and available support services
- Develop a model for smooth transitions from preparatory education to mainstream education
- Make use of support provided by organisations for families and the schooling of multilingual students (e.g. homework support)

### **Cultural understanding and language**

- Recognising celebrations and traditions, as well as culturally responsive pedagogy, strengthens students' identities
- Practices vary between schools
- Religion- and culture-related needs should be addressed more equitably in everyday school life and school meals, and the expertise of cultural mediators should be utilised more extensively

### **Development recommendations**

- Make cultural diversity visible in everyday school structures and involve guardians in school activities (school year planning, celebrations, materials)
- Provide staff with training in cultural sensitivity and trauma-informed approaches
- Utilise the expertise of cultural mediators and multilingual teaching assistants and ensure sufficient resources for cultural mediation
- Expand the use of multilingual, plain-language and visual materials in teaching and communication

### **Communication between home and school – the greatest challenge**

- Language barriers, limited knowledge of the Finnish education system and some guardians' low literacy levels hinder communication
- Digital tools such as Wilma can both facilitate and restrict home–school communication; for many guardians, Wilma is difficult to use
- Message translation, cultural mediators, plain language, reliable interpretation and face-to-face meetings enable dialogue

### **Development recommendations**

- Provide multilingual introductions to Wilma, plain-language instructions and support in the initial phase
- Agree on shared principles for the use of interpreters in important discussions and further develop interpretation and cultural mediation services
- Encourage teachers to adopt a multi-channel communication model (e.g. Wilma, WhatsApp, video and voice messages, weekly newsletters, communication notebooks) and encourage guardians to contact teachers and principals with a low threshold
- Develop staff competence in plain language and accessibility
- Strengthen trust-based and equitable dialogue between guardians and schools through dialogical approaches

### **Guardians' sense of community and participation**

- Few contacts between guardians
- A wish for more informal, language-independent encounters
- Parent associations are perceived as distant, and multicultural representation is rare
- A need to develop parent meetings to be more dialogical
- Demand for class-level parent teams

### **Development recommendations**

- Establish class-based parent teams with regular meetings and clear role definitions
- Appoint a representative from each language group to the parent association
- Actively inform new families about the activities of parent associations and class parent teams in multiple languages
- Schedule language-independent community events and low-threshold meetings in the school's annual calendar
- Support peer-based activities in which experienced guardians act as culturally sensitive partners for new families
- Encourage schools to organise class-level parent meetings that foster mutual acquaintance and agreement on shared practices

### **Interviews with School Staff and Other Professionals – Thematic Observations and Development Recommendations**

- 20 professionals participated in the interviews, including teachers, principals, cultural mediators, researchers, and professionals working in projects and organisations that collaborate with schools and multilingual guardians
- Key themes, challenges, good practices and development needs were identified

### **School Culture as Support for Multilingual Cooperation**

- Practices for cooperation between home and school need to be reviewed and renewed from a multilingual and multicultural perspective
- Development work must not rest on individual teachers alone; shared discussion, jointly designed practices and collegial support are essential
- Cooperation between multilingual homes and schools should be inclusive, needs-based and action-oriented
- Building trust, openness and face-to-face encounters are central

- School culture has been developed through pedagogical cafés for staff, professional development, language-awareness and multicultural teams, and by taking multilingualism into account in recruitment

### **Development Recommendations**

- Establish shared and equitable municipality- and school-specific principles for receiving and cooperating with multilingual families
- Utilise the expertise of organisations and cultural mediators as part of the school's structural practices
- Provide teachers with in-service training in language awareness, intercultural understanding and cooperation with homes
- Establish teams in all multilingual schools to address issues related to multilingualism and cooperation with guardians
- Develop multilingual mentoring to support families in the initial phase
- Develop a centralised national advisory service for new families, offering remote consultations in their own language on the education system, available support services and rights

### **Everyday School Practices**

- Provide new families with information about the Finnish school system, school practices and home–school cooperation, including the school's expectations of guardians
- Everyday encounters are important: a low threshold for coming to school and asking questions
- Develop new formats for parent meetings, such as thematic or language-group-specific meetings, station-based or small-group work, and the involvement of partners or cultural mediators
- Increase guardians' participation in development and assessment discussions
- Excursions, shared game nights, workshops and other events where language is not central lower the threshold for attending school and strengthen community

### **Development Recommendations**

- Organise multilingual orientation sessions for all new families, presenting school practices, support services, home–school cooperation, communication channels and guardians' role in supporting their child's schooling
- Introduce more action-oriented and participatory approaches in parent meetings
- Lower the threshold for guardians to come to school through language-independent events

- Create incentive models for teachers who have successfully developed effective cooperation practices and share their expertise with colleagues

### **Communication Challenges Multilingual Cooperation**

- Communication is the greatest challenge in multilingual home–school cooperation
- Wilma does not reach all guardians, particularly when literacy levels are low
- Schools have used various solutions: personal contacts, messages sent via pupils’ school bags, visual materials, short translations, videos or voice messages in home languages, translation tools and plain language
- Interpreters are used with a low threshold in meetings, even when guardians report managing in English

### **Development Recommendations**

- Map guardians’ communication needs already at the beginning of the school year
- Provide multilingual introduction and support for using Wilma
- Improve Wilma’s user-friendliness from the perspective of multilingual guardians, for example through built-in translation tools
- Implement a multi-channel communication model combining Wilma with oral, visual and personal forms of communication
- Develop national guidelines for the use of interpretation services and accessible communication
- Ensure the quality of interpretation services at the national level
- Train staff in plain language and accessible communication, and establish shared guidelines for providing linguistic support to guardians

### **Strengthening Intercultural Understanding**

- Cultural differences affect relationships between home and school, although guardians according to the interviews rarely challenge the Finnish school system
- It is important to clarify the curriculum and its binding nature, and to engage in open dialogue with guardians about school practices
- In challenging situations, guardians were invited to school at an early stage for face-to-face discussions
- Multilingual instructors and cultural mediators play an important role as bridge-builders between homes and schools
- Making families’ cultures visible and valued in everyday school life is essential
- The importance of both Finnish and the home language is emphasised in dialogue with guardians

- It was considered important to dismantle assumptions related to students with immigrant backgrounds

### **Development Recommendations**

- Provide regular training for school staff on cultural awareness and encountering diversity
- Strengthen the visibility of different cultures in everyday school life
- Deepen cooperation with cultural mediators and multilingual instructors in everyday educational situations
- Develop discussion frameworks for addressing educational values and behavioural expectations together with guardians
- Establish a national cultural mediation centre to provide consultation for schools and municipalities without their own cultural mediators

### **Regional Cooperation and Projects Supporting Multicultural School Work**

- Schools' own resources are not always sufficient for receiving and including multilingual families
- Cities and municipalities provide schools with interpretation services, cultural and multilingual mediators, translation support, ready-made communication templates and materials in multiple languages
- Very positive experiences have been gained from municipal projects supporting multilingual home–school cooperation, particularly during the preparatory education phase
- Cooperation with organisations has been important in receiving and supporting multilingual families

### **Development Recommendations**

- Strengthen municipal support for schools in organising multilingual and multicultural home–school cooperation
- Utilise models developed in preparatory education for receiving and supporting families at the municipal level
- Make use of organisations' expertise in engaging with and supporting families

