



## ARTICLE

### **Mother tongue classes: A parental choice, but does choice equate with parental involvement and engagement in learning?**

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## **Mother tongue classes: A parental choice, but does choice equate with parental involvement and engagement in learning?**

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### **Abstract**

In Sweden, all children who speak a language other than Swedish at home have a right to mother tongue classes when there are five children in the municipality who request the language as a mother tongue class. This paper reports on ongoing research that is investigating parental involvement and engagement in their children's learning of their mother tongue language. Even though mother tongue classes require an active parental choice and the filling in of an application form, some children drop out of their mother tongue classes claiming the classes are boring and uninteresting, and teachers find that some children do not meet the requirement of using the language as an active home language. Through examination of young learner and school-aged students' mother tongue provision and prompted reflection with parents, we tease apart the elements of agency necessary for parents to feel involved and engaged in their children's mother tongue lessons.

Keywords: English; home language; mother tongue; mother tongue tuition; parental involvement; engagement; Sweden.

## **Introduction**

Sweden has a unique model of mother tongue tuition for children who speak a language other than Swedish with at least one of their parents or carers on a daily basis and who have a basic knowledge of this language. This model has a long tradition (Cabau, 2014). Indeed, as Rosén, Straszer and Wedin (2019) in their excellent overview of the history of mother tongue classes in Sweden wrote: “Since the home language reform in the mid-1970s home language instruction (which in 1997 was named Mother Tongue Tuition [MTT]) has been an elective subject offered in compulsory school and regulated in the national curriculum” (p. 182). Currently, there needs to be at least five students in the municipality whose parents and/or carers make the active choice to request mother tongue tuition, and an available “suitable teacher” of the language (Utbildningsdepartementet, 2011) for a student to receive mother tongue tuition. The tuition is usually 45 minutes to one hour long and usually held after the end of the school day for pupils not receiving mother tongue tuition. Students travel across the municipality to attend mother tongue classes together with students from other schools. These mother tongue teachers work in several schools within a local authority area and are not attached to any specific school. Although this educational provision is striking, a number of researchers have questioned whether the intention of the provision is realized in the implementation of mother tongue tuition at the local level (e.g. Hyltenstam and Milani, 2012).

This paper considers the experiences of parents of a relatively under-researched group of mother tongue students, namely those studying English as a home language who were born in Sweden or had moved to Sweden before 18 months and had been exposed daily to Swedish. Further the participants had to have native competence in Swedish and attend schools where nearly all pupils are native speakers of Swedish. English holds high status in Sweden (Hult, 2012), is a compulsory school subject (cf. English mother tongue tuition), and children who speak English at home are frequently told how lucky they are and how useful English will be as a world language, to access popular culture, in their university studies and in their future careers. This contrasts with many studies researching minoritised language use, including Palm, Ganuza and Hedman’s (2019) study of school children taking mother tongue instruction in Somali: “the interviewed adolescents tended to associate Somali language use mainly with sentimental values, the home and the personal sphere, and less with instrumental values pertaining to upward social mobility and empowerment” (p. 72). Thus, in comparison, English is, as Jin, Schjølberg, and Tambs (2017) pointed out, a high-status heritage language, and a language that has “hitherto received little attention with HL [home language] transmission community” (p. 66), and even less within mother tongue tuition research.

Most published research studies that consider mother tongue tuition focus on mother tongue teaching of students born outside of Sweden and who have learnt Swedish since arriving in the country and who speak a minoritised language. For example, Reath Warren (2013) investigated a mother tongue class in Kurdish, Palm, Ganuza and Hedman (2019) explored language use and investment among Somali children and adolescents attending mother tongue classes, and Rosén, Straszer and Wedin (2019) interviewed teachers working in schools “with a high number of students with mother tongues other than Swedish, and also a high number of newly arrived students” (p. 189).

The findings presented here come from an ongoing project that is investigating parental involvement and engagement in mother tongue education. Here we addressed the following research questions in relation to English language mother tongue instruction:

1. How do parents perceive mother tongue teachers' work on parental involvement given the limited contact time with the students and the peripatetic nature of their work?
2. What do parents perceive are the barriers to parental involvement and how might these affect children's interest in continuing with their mother tongue lessons?

### **Mother tongue maintenance**

As noted above, Sweden is unusual in its provision of mother tongue tuition. Further, as part of the compulsory school system, the grade awarded for mother tongue classes can improve a student's overall or final high school grade average. However, the mother tongue grade cannot decrease a student's overall or final high school grade average. Students have the possibility to swap their lowest compulsory school subject grade for their mother tongue class grade when this is higher. Mother tongue maintenance has gained increased international attention as the growth in migration for economic and other reasons, including war, has challenged the linguistic landscapes of many countries. For example, Connaughton-Crean and Ó Duibhir (2017) reported that the number of non-Irish nationals living in the Republic of Ireland increased from 224 261 to 535 475 between 2002 and 2016, with 612 018 people resident in the Republic, representing just over 13% of the population of Ireland, using a language other than Irish or English as their home language. This shift in the linguistic landscape has resulted in an increase in the number of school children with a home language other than English or Irish (the two national languages of the Republic of Ireland), yet one without nationally organized provision for mother tongue teaching (see Mc Daid, 2007). Interestingly, as Connaughton-Crean and Ó Duibhir pointed out the Irish National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) highlight the importance of mother tongue maintenance, but unlike in Sweden, the responsibility for mother tongue's maintenance and development is placed on the individual families:

“It is important for the child to continue to develop his/her language and literacy skills in the home language. An increasing number of libraries provide books in a variety of languages and these may be used by parents to support the child's language and literacy skills in the home language. Families may have satellite access to radio and television programmes in their home language.” (NCCA, 2006, p. 9)

Not surprisingly, Connaughton-Crean and Ó Duibhir (2017) found that the learning of English was important due to the “global dominance, prestige and status of English” (p. 32), something most children in their study and all the parents articulated. They also found the majority of children in their study faced difficulties in developing their literacy skills in their mother language, yet as most of the children moved to Ireland when “very young”, Connaughton-Crean and Ó Duibhir pointed out their literacy skills in their mother tongue might be limited when they arrived in Ireland. This lack of literacy skills in the mother tongue is something that mother tongue teachers in Sweden also encounter, not least as mother tongue

classes are not only taken by new immigrants, but also by school students born in Sweden who use a language other than Swedish on a daily basis with one of their parents or carers.

The leaving of mother tongue development to the individual family is echoed in the title of Yousef and Taylor-Leech's (2018) article: "It would be nice if someone took the load off you" that reports on the challenges of maintaining Arabic as a mother tongue in Australia. In contrast to Ireland, after colonization Australia has always been cultural and linguistically diverse, yet like Ireland the perceived global importance of English coupled with a desire to assimilate has resulted in a rapid learning of English by school-aged immigrants (e.g. Ndhlov and Willoughby, 2017). Indeed as Yousef and Taylor-Leech's (2018) concluded: "in the English-dominant environment of Australia, the broader social conditions for heritage language maintenance are limited" (p. 11) not least due to the lack of support for home tongue maintenance, teaching and learning outside of home. Of particular note in relation to the Swedish context of our study, Yousef and Taylor-Leech endorse Hattoss' (2013) suggestion for formalized after school home language tuition.

The impact of formalized home language tuition is less clear for young children. For example, Bohnacker, Lindgren and Öztekin (2016) reported no significantly higher vocabulary production among children (aged 4 years to 6 years 11 months) attending home language tuition in Turkish or German. Whether a statistical difference would be found at a higher age after more years of mother tongue tuition remains an open question. We thus find that internationally a lack of formalized home tongue classes makes the maintenance of the language difficult and the development of literacy skill challenging, yet that home language tuition has been found not to make a statistically significant difference in expressive vocabulary knowledge, at least for Turkish and German.

If we now turn to consider the Swedish context in more detail and look at the curriculum for mother tongue tuition, we find that the aims are well illustrated by the elements of the curriculum selected by Cabau (2014) and that these demonstrate the government's belief that a minimal instruction time can support the home language use to allow the student to achieve these aims:

[...] "Having access to their [the pupils] mother tongue also facilitates language development and learning in different areas [...]. Teaching in the mother tongue should aim at helping the pupils to develop knowledge in and about the mother tongue. Through teaching, pupils should be given the opportunity to develop their spoken and written language so that they become confident in their language skills and can express themselves in different contexts and for different purposes. [...] Teaching should give pupils the opportunities to develop their cultural identity and become multilingual." (Skolverket, 2011, p. 83).

This however juxtaposes with the detailed curriculum analysis of the Mother Tongue curriculum undertaken by Reath Warren (2013) who, based on her analysis and other data collection, argued:

"It is difficult to provide students with "a wealth of opportunities for enhancing confidence in their language abilities" (Lg11, p. 11) when the only subject taught in their mother tongue is allocated just one hour per week, and where mother tongue teachers

come after hours or not at all, and are not part of the pedagogical life of the school to any extent. The lack of resources compounds this problem, as does the low status of the subject, the lack of communication between MTT and other teachers and the periferal [*sic*] positioning of the subject.” (Reath Warren, 2013, p. 107).

The tensions between mother tongue tuition, mother tongue use, Swedish and school achievement repeat throughout the research literature. Both Basic and Sullivan (2019), and Palm, Ganuza and Hedman (2019) report that some teachers believe it is only in school that pupils with another mother tongue will hear and use Swedish. However, as Palm, Ganuza and Hedman report “[t]he adolescents [in their study] also thought that many of their teachers believed that they spoke only, or mostly, Somali outside of school, despite this not being the case” (p. 72). Equally, one of Rosén, Straszer and Wedin’s (2019) findings was that teachers were concerned that the students lacking skills in their mother tongue would have issues learning in general and that a lack of mother tongue skill would make their learning of Swedish more difficult. This is reflected in students who are born abroad, or who have parents that were born abroad, and who do not attend mother tongue tuition, being less likely to reach the goals of the Swedish compulsory school than students whose parents were both born in Sweden (Taguma, Kim, Brink, and Teltemann, 2010), and students who were born abroad yet attend mother tongue tuition (Skolverket, 2008, p. 19).

Teachers of English as a mother tongue are colleagues of teachers of other mother tongues and are thus exposed to such tensions, even if the position of English in school and Swedish society differ greatly in status from other languages taught as mother tongues. Further, the challenges outlined by Reath Warren (2013, p. 107) apply equally to the teaching English as a mother tongue and provide an understanding of the challenges the teachers are working under and the school context in which they can invite parental participant and engagement.

## **Parental participation and engagement**

A parent’s participation and engagement in the education of their child and how this participation and engagement can be both positive and negative is widely studied in the literature (e.g. Clinton and Hattie, 2013; Fan and Williams, 2010; Hornby and Blackwell, 2018; Hornby and Lafeale, 2010; Thomas, Muls, De Backer and Lombaerts, 2019). In this paper we focus on how the mother tongue teachers work with parents to encourage parental participation and engagement, and the barriers encountered. We will, therefore, not be considering the student’s perception of their parent’s participation and engagement in their education and whether they consider this to be positive or otherwise. Equally, we do not consider the impact on student outcomes. The complexity of these interactions has been examined by, among others, Fan and Williams (2010).

To provide a theoretical frame for our study, we decided to work with Hornby and Lafael’s (2011) Model of factors acting as a barrier to parental involvement coupled with the examples Hornby and Blackwell (2018) list in their study of “the current state of play with regard to PI [Parental Involvement]” (p. 111). Hornby and Lafael’s (2011) model includes four areas: Individual parent and family factors; Child factors; Parent-teacher factors; and Societal factors. The first area, Individual parent and family factors,

covers areas such as parents' beliefs and parental involvement, their perceptions of invitations for involvement, their current life context, and their class, ethnicity and gender. The second area, Child factors covers areas such as age, learning difficulties and disabilities, gifts and talents and behavioural problems. The third area, Parent-teacher factors cover aspects such as differing goals and agendas, differing attitudes, differing language used, and the fourth area, Societal factors covers, historical and demographic, political and economics issues. The examples provided in Hornby and Blackwell (2018) guided our small-scale pilot study into parental Involvement and engagement among parents who actively choose for their children to study a mother tongue for around one hour a week outside of standard school hours and often taught at another school and together with students from a number of different schools.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

A sample of parents whose children were born in Sweden, use English daily with a parent and/or carer and who attend English mother tongue tuition were contacted. The parents participating provided us with insight into the mother tongue education from pre-school through to secondary school, but not post-compulsory upper secondary school, and in total their children had had lessons taught by five mother tongue teachers. All the children and teachers are based in the same Swedish university town that is north of Stockholm. To maintain participant anonymity, and particularly the anonymity of the teachers who were not asked to inform this study, we provide no detailed information about the number of parents, or children. The risk of individual teacher identification is further reduced as this study is conducted in a municipality with a relatively large teaching team and many of the teachers work with students from pre-school to upper-secondary school. The study follows the Swedish Ethics Law (Swedish law 2003:460), and the Swedish Research Council's ethical guidelines (Swedish Research Council, 2017).

### **Procedure**

Parents were interviewed by one of the authors using a semi-structured interview schedule that followed Hornby and Blackwell (2018) along with additional questions that focused on the distinct nature of mother tongue tuition. Questions were:

- Have you seen a written policy on parental involvement and engagement for mother tongue tuition?
- What activities are used to encourage parental involvement and engagement in your child's mother tongue class?
- Do you think policy or practice on parental involvement and engagement has changed since your child started with English mother tongue classes, and if so how?
- If you think there has been a change, what have been the key influences in bringing about these changes?

- What do you consider are the main barriers to parental involvement and engagement in English mother tongue classes?
- What are mother tongue tuition teachers doing to overcome barriers to parental involvement and engagement?
- Why did you decide to apply for mother tongue tuition for your child?
- Has your child expressed a desire to not continue with their mother tongue tuition, and does this encourage you to have more involvement and engagement in English mother tongue classes?

Responses to the eight questions were recorded and later collated and analysed. Illustrative quotations and descriptions of activities are presented in the results section.

## **Results**

Findings from the parents on each of the questions are presented below.

### **Have you seen a written policy on parental involvement and engagement for mother tongue tuition?**

None of our participants have seen a written policy on parental involvement, yet as one of our participants who took the time to follow the web-links included in an email to the parents of English mother tongue students points out the documents that are available on the website make it clear the important role the parents have in supporting and developing the mother tongue:

“I have not seen anything like it, no. I mean on the whole we have not received much written information at all about MTT until our girl started “årskurs 2”, her second year in school. It happened when she shifted teacher for her mother tongue class. Then we as parents got a letter describing when the first lesson would be and with whom. The 1-page letter was generic and directed towards all ages and also contained a link to the legislation for MTT which I clicked on since I am interested in this area. When reading information there you understand that we as parents have a crucial role for her learning, not least her dad who’s the native English speaker. The school and preschool are completely detached from this activity on the whole, apart from it taking place in those facilities.”

### **What activities are used to encourage parental involvement and engagement in your child’s mother tongue class?**

There were a variety of perceptions here. One parent mentioned attending a “meet your child’s mother tongue evening”, and a bowling evening. These events were neither reported nor familiar when prompted by other parents. We also detected variation in attempts to encourage parental involvement. At one extreme one parent reports:

“The only thing I can think of is when we as parents have had brief encounters with the MTT teacher. Those occasions I have tried to ask about how it is going and also brought

the fact that our girl struggles to speak it. She understands lots but prefers to speak Swedish. That she is shy does not help but all teachers have been dealing with that really well I must say. Once a year or so the teacher she had those last two previous years called us at the end of term and tried to advise us what to do in order to increase her English vocabulary. That teacher also stressed the importance of my husband speaking only English with our child when being at home. That has not been so easy for different reasons and one is that her dad had to learn Swedish himself in order to work. Another obstacle is that he works in another town, so he is away from home a lot during the weeks. I have been thinking that it is a bit odd that they approach me and not him since I become a kind of mediator here.”

In this answer we also see the belief in the one parent-one language approach rather than an approach that promotes translanguaging (see e.g. García and Wei, 2014). We also see the importance the mother tongue teacher places on language exposure and use in the home environment.

At the other extreme one parent reported regular information about their child’s class and homework activity, including access to a Google classroom with lesson plans and PowerPoint presentations. This parent also reported that the mother tongue teacher sent personal emails when concerned that the student was not on top of the work and suggested ways in which they could support their child with their homework and learning generally. This parent felt fully involved and able to work appropriately with their child at home.

Another parent also experienced parental involvement when their child came home at the end of the semester with their work neatly put together by the mother tongue teacher into a book. The parent reported that this encouraged them to read their child’s work with their child. However, they also reported that this did not lead to regular parental involvement over the term. Interestingly, another parent reported they were involved with their child’s mother tongue tuition as English was not used that very much in their home and their child felt the classes were very difficult and that the other students in the class were much better.

**Do you think policy or practice on parental involvement and engagement has changed since your child started with English mother tongue classes, and if so how?**

Initially most parents could not think of any changes. One reported an increase in the sharing of work and teaching via online platforms, but they also reflected that this increase could be associated with their child moving up from grade to grade. That is, once their child had learnt to read, and had moved through school more things were shared with the parents as more resources were written. Another parent mentioned organizational changes that have affected the start of mother tongue tuition, and reflects on the status of English in their answer:

“I think not, but it might have happened. One major change that was happening just before our child was entitled to MTT was that the municipality decided to change the year the classes start, from three years old to five. That was a bit of a pity for her development I think since it would have helped her/us at an even earlier stage to have

a professional tutor. In any case the reason for this change of policy was really poor since it came about after a review of the municipality concluding that the quality of the MTT was not good or too low. It had to be improved, especially in more rare languages. The idea was then that second language support or MTT should start straight away when the children comes to nursery or preschool, even at earlier ages than three or as now five and be mainstreamed in the whole organisation. In practice it meant that all preschool teachers should support and teach a diversity of mother tongues to the children they cared for from day one. And this without any prep or language teaching education! I mean the resources are already limited and then to delegate this task to all preschool teachers in the municipality is a bit wishful thinking. It is easy with English of course but not many other languages!”

**If you think there has been a change, what have been the key influences in bringing about these changes?**

The key influence about changes in parental involvement is a change in teacher. Once of our participants expresses this very clearly, and even suggests irritation at the low level of invitation for parental involvement.

“The changes we have experienced relate to the teachers involved. They have different styles both for teaching and for how they communicate with us as parents. None of them appear to have had close contact with any of the schools or preschools neither on an organisational level nor on the interpersonal level (among teachers so to speak). This has been visible on a number of occasions with missed information about special school activities such sports days and school outings. As parents we have not been asked explicitly to provide details about changes to the school day, but given our experience of the organisations’ inability to communication about these practical matters we have tried to do so ourselves instead. At the same time, we have had very little information really about the structure of the MTT even after three years of our child taking MTT classes.”

**What do you consider are the main barriers to parental involvement and engagement in English mother tongue classes?**

In line with the answers to the previous question, one of the main barriers mentioned was the creativity of the teacher:

“I think that one of the main barriers is the interest of the teachers engaged in MTT, or perhaps the random interest in parental involvement among the staff. This can be the result of no common policy or practice for this part in the MTT organisation. Of course it is also a challenge to reach out to parents that might not be so motivated to take part in it all. They might think that this is a school task or they might be daunted by the responsibility that is put on their shoulders. After all we are talking about relatively limited resources. One hour per child a week maximum.”

Another aspect raised by a couple of parents is the separation of the mother tongue tuition from the rest of the child's school day. One parent reported that this separation was commented upon by their child's pre-school staff, but in a positive way as the English mother tongue teacher discussed wanted to know what had been happening in pre-school to align their mother tongue teaching to similar activities. This was not something the other mother tongue teachers were doing.

One parent expressed a desire for greater communication between school and mother tongue teachers:

"But I think that if the whole school world were united then it might be a different matter. In our case it is evident that the teachers of the regular education have no idea what so ever about what is happening in this part of our child's education. They seem to have hardly met in fact!"

The need for work to flow from class to home was mentioned by one parent,

"For us it has been easier to get engaged when our child has been bringing home some examples of what has happened or homework to do for the next lesson. But that has only happened once! And that is with the new teacher who started last week."

Another parent commented that it is not easy to be involved in a once-a-week one-hour activity especially when your child is a teenager who does not want to discuss what was done in class. The involvement then becomes making sure your child gets to the class, that is frequently at another school, and that your child does not forget class.

### **What are mother tongue tuition teachers doing to overcome barriers to parental involvement and engagement?**

This question all parents had problems answering. Most saw the problems that Reath Warren (2013) found, but none could point to anything specific beyond the use of Google classrooms and email contact to guide the parents in the best way to support their child. One parent commented on their child having to make their way half way across town to get to a one-hour class, and another commented that their child had no idea what the other children in their mother tongue class were called.

### **Why did you decide to apply for mother tongue tuition for your child?**

The reasons parents decided to apply for mother tongue tuition varied. Many did so because they could, others because they used English less than perhaps they should at home and they wanted their child's English to improve in case they spent a year in an English-speaking country, and others to make sure their child could communicate with non-Swedish speaking relatives. One parent expressed their reasons as follows:

"I decided to do it since as a Swede I knew about this opportunity for bilingual children and I find it very important that our child gets the best possible chance to communicate properly with all her relatives, including siblings, that have English as their mother tongue. Some speak some Swedish, but very little. It has become evident too that not all countries have this excellent support. Very few other countries seems to allocate such resources to these children and this is also why it has been a bit confusing for my

partner to get a grasp of the Swedish model of mother tongue tuition and in particular their role in it.”

Interestingly, no parent mentioned creating a context in which their child could make English-speaking friends. Language is learnt in social contexts, including play. Increasing natural exposure to English would support these children’s English language skill development and their acquisition of register.

**Has your child expressed a desire to not continue with their mother tongue tuition, and does this encourage you to have more involvement and engagement in English mother tongue classes?**

Only two parents responded to this question.

“Our child is perhaps a bit too young to be able to express such a strong will or attitude. On the whole she is very happy with her MTT lessons in school even if she resists speaking English quite a lot when being at home. However, since we speak English a lot she hears it daily and seems to understand the majority of what is said. It is not a “secret” parent language in our home. Being honest to myself, I think that I would be encouraged to get involved even more if she said she did not want to do this anymore.”

The other outlined how they had discussed with their child that mother tongues give a school grade than can be swapped for their lowest other school grade to increase their grade average, and that English mother tongue classes will help them in their compulsory English classes in school. They did admit that if their child was really negative it would be difficult to get them to continue, not least due to the extra travel and homework the classes involve for their child.

**Discussion**

The findings we have presented above are based on a small pilot study in one Swedish municipality, and it must be recognized that these might not be representative of other municipalities in Sweden. Municipalities in Sweden range from large cities, such as areas of Stockholm and Gothenburg, to large sparsely populated areas with a small town as their administrative hub. However, the findings echo the concerns of Reath Warren (2013) and the challenges of creating a structure that encourages parental involvement and engagement even if the parents have actively applied for their children to attend English mother tongue tuition. Some parents in our study felt involved in their children’s English mother tongue tuition while others felt uninvolved, and even uninvited.

We noted improvement in how parents perceived that mother tongue teachers were working for parental involvement, as children got older. This appears to be linked to when students begin to be taught in groups that include students from many schools and information about where the classes will take place needs to be sent out. Along with this, the mother tongue teachers beginning to use Google classroom and give the parents access to be able to follow their children’s learning.

Another key factor related to how parents perceive that mother tongue teachers work for parental involvement was based on the individual teacher. These teachers are not seen as part of a school, but rather as individuals, and some of them work more to invite parental participation than others, yet perhaps this also depends on how well a child is progressing. One parent mentioned that their child's mother tongue teacher regularly emailed them about how best to assist their child. It is difficult to imagine that a teacher has time to individually email every parent every week; it is more likely that these parental participation actions are directed towards the parents of children who require more support at home. This is something that would be useful to investigate and is an element of our forthcoming larger study.

The barriers the parents mentioned included lack of information to parents, and lack of communication between the school and mother tongue teacher, along with the parents' own inertia in engaging with the mother tongue teachers. This was particularly apparent in the younger years before the children started with written homework and were taught in groups of children from more than one school. The parents generally wanted more insight and to be helped in how to support their children with their mother tongue not least so that the lessons would be more productive for language development, including academic literacy development in English.

One barrier that was also highlighted in the answers to the question about what the parent would do if their child expressed a desire to not continue with their mother tongue tuition was associated with the effort that goes into getting their child to classes in another school. This raises an issue for parental involvement in an organizational activity, getting their children to class, as opposed to parental involvement in education, per se. We suggest that the parents may not see the value of these classes given the ubiquitous nature of English in Swedish society and on the Internet, and organizational difficulties are perhaps perceived as greater than for out of school activities, such as sport, drama, scouting, and music. Faced with this organizational challenge and lack of enthusiasm for the class by their child, may make parents and/or carers wonder, what is it that English mother tongue classes provide that their child does not receive elsewhere?

## **Conclusion**

Findings from this small-scale pilot study conducted in one Swedish municipality suggest that parents who choose to apply for their children to attend English mother tongue tuition would like to be involved more in their child's mother tongue teaching and learning. Interestingly, as physical contact becomes more difficult, the perception of being involved increases. Parental pressure in getting children to classes coupled with the high status of English and its omnipresence in Sweden can function as a demotivator.

We suggest that a coordinated approach to parental involvement from early years upwards would improve parental perception of involvement in these classes, and provide parents with greater motivation to help their children when necessary and to better show interest in their child's learning so that fewer children drop out of their mother tongue classes. Further we suggest termly end of year

activities for all students, parents and teachers involved in English mother tongue classes in order to improve the feeling of community and the feeling that the teachers can be approached to discuss their child's development and how this can be best supported. Mother tongue tuition may be a parental choice, but without teachers working for parental involvement this active choice does not equate with parental involvement and engagement in children's learning.

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