

## **HOME-PRESCHOOL COLLABORATION – TRANSFORMED IN THE AGE OF DIGITIZATION?**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The preschool mission is among other things to cooperate with the home and to create trustfully relationships with the guardians, this is carried out by maintaining ongoing dialogues with the guardians about their child's wellbeing, development, and learning (Lpfö 18). Digital communication channels are increasing in Swedish preschools. When the communication shifts from being face to face and becomes more digital it could have consequences for the relationship and the collaboration. The aim of this pilot study is to explore how the conditions for cooperation between home and preschool have changed as communication has become increasingly digital.

In Sweden 85% of all children aged 1-5 participate in preschool activities, which amounts to 517,000 children (Skolverket, 2020). Several studies also emphasize the importance of a functioning collaboration between parents and preschools, as it creates increased security for the parents and good conditions for the children's development (Vuorinen, Sandberg, Sheridan & Williams 2014; Vuorinen 2020). The relationship between home and preschool is well-researched (Löfdahl 2014; Kocyigit 2015; Samardzics 2014), but when it comes to how communication takes place, only a few studies have been conducted, even in an international perspective (Higgins & Cherrington, 2017; Stratigos & Fenech, 2021), which includes studies focusing on digital communication (Stratigos & Fenech, 2021). The studies that do exist indicate that collaboration is hampered when communication becomes digital, due to limitations in the applications, but also because digital communication imposes other demands on the parent group that can be difficult to meet (Aviva and Simon 2020; Eckeskog 2019; Higgins & Cherrington 2017), for example, for minority groups (Xavier & Laurent 2017; Kurucz, Lehl & Anders, 2020). The competence of preschool teachers and how long they have been teaching is also crucial for successful collaboration with families (Vuorinen, Sandberg, Sheridan & Williams 2014; Samardzics 2014), which means that the low level of education among preschool staff (40% of those working in childcare in Sweden are trained preschool teachers becomes a complicating factor (Skolverket, 2020).

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The use of digital applications in preschool is increasing (Stratigos & Fenech 2021), while ethical challenges related to content, equal access, and teacher workload arise. The benefits that are highlighted include less stress, as digitalization means less dependence on time and place for both preschool teachers and parents. Additionally, efficiency gains are created when preschool teachers can reach many simultaneously (Eckeskog 2019). Additional gains are the relief experienced by preschool teachers when information is lasting and can be returned to by both preschool teachers and guardians.

There is widespread use of social media apps, such as WhatsApp, as a means of communication between home and preschool, which raises questions about GDPR and general issues of privacy among guardians and preschool teachers (Aviva & Simon 2020).

When communication moves from being face-to-face to becoming digital, it also becomes more fragmented and text-based, which can be problematic for minority groups that benefit from face-to-face communication (Xavier & Laurent 2017; Antony-Newman, 2019). The competence of preschool teachers when it comes to inclusion and interculturality is also important for how cooperation works, as engagement is strengthened, especially in the group of parents with migrant backgrounds (Kurucz, Lehl & Anders 2020). It is important in this context that the preschool's mission to create trusting relationships, collaborate, and create participation applies to all parent groups, which should also be done through ongoing conversations with guardians about the child's well-being, development, and learning (Lpfö 18).

The research group consider it important to conduct studies on collaboration between home and preschool with a specific focus on how collaboration changes when communication is digitized and how conditions change.

What do parents and preschool staff consider working well in collaboration and what does not work as well?

What changes can be observed over time regarding collaboration and the use of different communication channels?

The research group explored the problem area from two perspectives: 1) guardian's- and 2) preschool teacher's. Data was collected by five semistructured focus group interviews, two interviews with guardians and three interviews with preschool teachers. In sum 331 minutes of interviews were recorded with video camera. The total t Analysis were carried out with qualitative content analysis (Schreier, 2012). The study has been approved by the Swedish ethics review board (Dnr: 2022-06618-01).

The results show that guardians and preschool teachers communicate through different communication channels such as IST-Blog, phone texts, phone calls, notes and face to face when picking up or dropping off their child. Both preschool teachers and guardians values the commitment when teachers use different communication

channels depending on the guardians needs. Both participant groups also emphasize the necessity to complement digital communication with face to face. Face to face communication is highly valued by guardians and preschool teachers and there is a consensus that this never can be fully replaced by digital communication. Digital communication by the IST-blog is used to inform the guardians what happens at preschool in daily activities and invites the guardians to get a closer look in their child's development and learning. That is why information and pictures published on platforms/the blog from a guardian's perspective sees as valuable and strengthens the ongoing dialogue about the children's learning process. The information that is published on the blog sees as equivalent from a preschool teacher's perspective and as it reaches out to all guardians. The teachers emphasizes though that the functions on the IST-blog are deficient when it comes to the guardian's possibility to response about thoughts, ideas, and opinions, because there are no such function in the blog

The result is discussed related to the increased possibilities for preschool teachers to reach guardians through various ways of communication channels. But also, the consequences for the cooperation in a scenario with continued increased digital communication is discussed as it could contribute to a more distanced relationship between home and preschool. In our result it is not very clear how much the digital communication has increased, but the result shows that communication face to face works as an effective complement to digital communication and leads to an intensified involvement for guardians.

**Keywords:** preschool teacher, guardians, communication, communication channels

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