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New-arrivals challenged by remote teaching: creating solutions during the COVID-19 pandemic

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New-arrivals challenged by remote teaching: creating solutions during the COVID-19 pandemic

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Abstract

Ensuring access to equal education is more complex than adopting remote teaching approaches. International reactions to Covid-19 included closing physical schools and moving teaching online. This has created learning challenges for newly arrived refugees and immigrants, and teaching challenges for their teachers. On 18 March 2020, language teaching for post-compulsory school-aged refugees and immigrants moved to remote teaching. This paper investigates this move. Through semi-structured interviews, we investigated how teachers attempted to assure equal access to these language courses and their perception of their students' experiences of this shift. We found that many of the teachers' students were inexperienced computer users. We also found that the teachers perceived that their students' feelings of isolation from society increased, and that this in turn reduced their abilities to access the education being offered. Remote teaching is not sufficient on its own to support the social function of these courses. However, the interviewed teachers are highly creative teachers. For example, they kept trialling combinations of a wide range of communication possibilities including visiting students at home and holding outdoor meetings. In these ways they created an instantiation of agency that may have encouraged students. These actions suggest avenues for future research and potential ways of ameliorating the educational challenges created by the sudden move to teaching online.

Keywords: Equality; Covid-19; Immigrants; Language learning; Literacy.

Introduction

Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic (WEIRD) countries (Haidt, 2012) attract immigrants who do not speak the language of their new home country. Immigrants to minor language WEIRD countries, such as Norway and Sweden, have rarely had any contact with the language of their new home country prior to arrival and usually learn the language of their new country from scratch. Immigration status, particularly among refugees who have experienced flight coupled with the challenges of losing personal and/or professional status and seeking asylum, often influences later experiences of autonomy and agency, with language skills a key component of these experiences (Al Sharou, 2020).

This paper considers the experiences and perceptions of teachers of the Swedish language for immigrants (SFI) programme, as they worked to assure equal access to these language courses after Swedish COVID-19 guidelines moved these courses online after March 17, 2020.

Background

SFI is organised so that over a four-week period, each student participates in an average of 15 hours of language teaching per week. This allows the students to combine their SFI study with other activities, including where appropriate other courses and internships. There is a large degree of variation in previous educational experience among SFI students; there are students with no formal educational experience and there are students with university degrees. This variation, together with individual life situations and personal long-term goals, means that some immigrants achieve the educational goals of the programme faster than others. To accommodate this variation, every student has an individual study plan outlining their learning route to achieving the educational goals of the programme. These goals are learning to read and write Swedish; speak, converse, read, listen and understand Swedish in different contexts; use relevant aids; adapt their language use to different recipients and situations; be able to learn languages; and use strategies to communicate (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2018, p. 7, *authors' own translation*) to the level necessary to study primary or secondary school level courses at an adult education institute. These individual routes are based around standard study paths through four courses. When considering the results and discussion in this article, it is important to bear in mind that few individuals who move to Sweden to take up highly qualified employment attend SFI. This is because their working life tends to be in a language in which they are already highly proficient. However, most refugees who come to Sweden attend SFI courses as part of their settlement programmes. Indeed, the majority of students studying SFI in non-metropolitan rural areas, that is areas with a population density of less than 1,500 inhabitants per km² (Dijkstra, Hamilton, Lall, and Wahba, 2020) and the context for the study reported in this paper, are refugees from outside of the European Union and other WEIRD countries.

There is no upper age limit for SFI. This means that older migrants have the opportunity to learn basic Swedish to navigate Swedish society and integrate. However, there is a lower age limit. To study these courses immigrants have to be at least 16 years of age. Younger immigrants are supported in their learning of Swedish in compulsory school. A result of under 16-year-olds attending compulsory school is that these young immigrants often learn Swedish more rapidly than their parents and older siblings.

The children's more rapid acquisition of Swedish potentially changes family home and community literacy practices (Barton and Hamilton, 1998; Barton, Hamilton and Ivanič, 2000). These are the literacy practices of everyday life such as those associated with paying bills, talking with authorities, and reading labels in the supermarket. These literacy practices support literacy development in family home and community settings and affect individuals' development of literacy skills in both first and second languages. When a learner also attends formal schooling or second language classes, formal school literacy practices and informal family home and community literacy practices can potentially support each other.

When children learn Swedish more rapidly, both parental and child feelings of agency (Ahearn, 2001) and autonomy can change from how they were before immigration. Sometimes children become language brokers and "mediate linguistically and culturally in formal and informal contexts and domains for their family, friends as well as members of the linguistic community to which they belong" (Antonini, 2015, p. 48).

Children who language-broker do more than simply interpret between two people. These children gain power beyond their years due to the brokering they enter into to help their family and friends. Hall and Guéry (2010) wrote that these children:

"...have to communicate the sense of what is being said, but they also have to be responding to the power relationships, the cultural backgrounds, the ages and experiences of the other speakers, as well as many wider contextual issues such as the degree of trust by the adults in the child, the short, medium and long-term consequences of what is brokered, the number of other speakers involved" (p. 34).

Moreover, these children may support adult language learning as acts of revised family home literacy practices. As part of these revised practices, these children may not only help their parents fill in forms, they may also support them as they work with their coursework and assignments.

Thus, the home and community literacy life situation described above potentially denies new adult immigrants linguistic agency and autonomy in society as they lack the power an individual usually has in discourse and social, home and community contexts. Ahearn (2001) defined agency as "the socioculturally-mediated capacity to act" (p. 112), and as Al Zidjaly (2009) argued, agency cannot be separated from power and is a required element for the ability to exert power. For example, do immigrants studying SFI have the agency to claim their role in a conversation, or not? And when they participate via language brokerage how does that affect their feelings of agency and autonomy, and empowerment? Agency can be seen as a continuum from being powerless to being empowered. For the new immigrant the language of communication interacts with the context. This, for example, can result in an immigrant experiencing powerlessness and little agency in contexts that in their former country they would have experienced empowerment.

SFI teachers frequently have excellent rapport with their students and provide their students with safe classroom learning environments (Holmkvist, Sullivan and Westum, 2018). This rapport works to support students to feel agency and power in the classroom during their language classes. Many SFI

teachers place the student at the centre of the learning situation or process, and encourage autonomy in language learning. That is, in their classrooms, they teach in ways to support their students to take control of their own learning process (Carson, 2008; Nunan, 1989; Tarone and Yule, 1989) and study Swedish at the speed that aligns with their personal situation and individual study plan.

The challenge of COVID-19

The move to online teaching in mid-March 2020, as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, challenged the ways in which SFI teachers could work to support autonomy in their students' language learning. This move also potentially changed the ways home and community literacy networks and practices supported the Swedish language learning of immigrants.

Unlike most of Europe, the Public Health Agency of Sweden, backed by the Swedish government, neither recommended a hard lock-down with small personal friendship bubbles, nor that teaching in pre-school, primary and secondary schools, that is for children up to 15 years old, should be suspended or moved online. Swedish society continued much as normal with a focus on voluntary social distancing, frequent hand washing and working from home when possible. Extended family and community literacy networks and practices were therefore minimally affected by the Public Health Agency of Sweden's recommendations. However, all post-compulsory education, including SFI, was moved online.

Pre-school, primary and secondary schools continued to teach as normal throughout the 2019-2020 academic year. Two of the arguments for this decision were that pre-school and primary school students need more care than older students and closing these would result in many healthcare workers taking leave from work to look after their children and that this would stress the Swedish healthcare system and, in particular, the provision of COVID-19 healthcare. A second argument was that the older students who would now be distance learning had come further in their education, and had both the study and computer skills necessary to continue successful learning. However, how this move has impacted on students with various needs is yet to be investigated. It is, however, possible that this move has heightened the challenge of ensuring all students have equal access to equitable education—a challenge for schools that was highlighted by Jobér (2015) five years prior to COVID-19 pandemic and the moving of post-compulsory school education online.

The Public Health Agency of Sweden's recommendation to move teaching on line for older students was also grounded in the knowledge that access to the Internet via mobile phones and computers is almost ubiquitous in Sweden. In spite of this, the mid-March 2020 move to online teaching potentially created challenges for the teachers, and for the students. In order to understand the nature of the challenges of online language teaching for students following SFI, we decided to employ a social constructivist approach to research the teachers' learning and their personal understandings of their students' situations after the shift to online teaching. Swedish was a language unknown to the students prior to beginning their studies. The purpose of this article is to understand the event or phenomenon of moving immigrant language teaching online "overnight."

Method

Our understanding of this phenomenon we constructed through interpretation of semi-structured interviews with teachers. The topics discussed were:

- The student body and their skills, including digital learning skills
- The teacher's pre-COVID 'normal' teaching approach
- Preparation for the move to remote teaching occasioned by COVID-19
- Immediate impact on teaching and equity
- Impact on Swedish speaking, listening, and conversational proficiency development
- Impact on Swedish reading and writing proficiency development, and
- Socio-cultural and economic factors issues affecting equity of education.

Participants

Four teachers of SFI agreed to be interviewed. These teachers reflect the range of course levels, with Teacher 1 teaching the most advanced students and Teachers 3 and 4 the lowest. Teacher 3 and 4 worked in one Swedish municipality, and Teachers 1 and 2 in two other municipalities.

Procedure

Teachers were interviewed by two of the authors using a semi-structured interview schedule (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2014). The first author interviewed Teachers 1 and 2, and the second author interviewed Teachers 3 and 4. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. We first read the transcriptions independently and noted our thoughts. Later we met for a joint reading, discussed our thoughts and readings to finalise our understandings. Illustrative quotations and descriptions of activities are presented in the results.

Ethical considerations

The study follows the Swedish Ethics Law (Swedish law 2003:460), and the Swedish Research Council's ethical guidelines (Swedish Research Council, 2017). The participants were informed about the study and its risks, both orally and in writing. They were able to ask questions before agreeing to participate and giving their written consent. They were made aware they could terminate the interview at any time, and have their interview deleted and not included in data analysis. No participant terminated nor withdrew their consent. To ensure participant anonymity we have numbered the teachers and provide little detail about them. We feel this is important as they teach potentially vulnerable groups of individuals and more information is unnecessary in relation to our research questions.

Findings

In this section, we present illustrative cases.

The student body and their skills, including digital learning skills

Three themes arose from the interviews: 1) learning to be literate, 2) lacking ICT skills, and 3) successfully using digital tools.

Learning to be literate

Teacher 1 described the variation in literacy skills in their classes clearly, “some have academic diplomas from their native countries, and some were illiterate at the start of SFI and have learned to read here”. This teacher highlights all her students can read. Hence, we gain a picture of illiterate students without formal schooling at the start of the programme becoming functionally literate during the programme. However, we know from experience and individual study plans, that some students take many years to reach the most advanced course. The teachers of the intermediate and lower level courses highlight that some of their students are illiterate, with Teacher 4 stating, “most of my students are illiterate and have never gone to school before”. In sum, many students learn literacy skills at the same time as they learn Swedish.

Lacking ICT skills

Our analysis revealed that the teachers perceived many students arrive with a lack of basic ICT skills. Teacher 3 recognised that even though their school provided the students with personal iPads, this would not lead to iPad use without students being taught how to use iPads when they started at the programme.

Successfully using digital tools

The interviews allowed us to see that these introductions to digital tools were sufficient for these tools to support student language learning. Teacher 4 highlights that although most of her students in her basic course have not gone to school, they use their iPads a lot during their SFI courses to support their language and literacy skill development. Further, Teacher 1 noted her advanced class used a digital teaching and learning platform as part of her daily teaching, and said, “I can comment and it works really well”.

The teachers’ pre-COVID ‘normal’ teaching approach

Our analysis resulted in two themes: 1) ad hoc use of digital tools, and 2) the importance of the classroom.

Ad hoc use of digital tools

Digital tools were used in class, for example to access language learning apps. However, how the students worked in these apps was unclear to the teachers as they could not access the apps, nor formatively assess their students’ work with these apps. It was only in the advanced level course that digital tools were used more systematically. Whether this was a personal teacher’s choice or a mixture of the students’ higher literacy and language skills and the teacher’s interest we were unfortunately unable decide.

The importance of the classroom

The teachers made us realize they feel classroom teaching is of primary importance. As the interviews were made after the move to online teaching, the interview discussion about their pre-COVID ‘normal’ teaching approaches needs to be understood in this context. That is, one in which the new is challenging and we interpret our discussions with the teachers as pinpointing the key aspects they have difficulty in replicating online. It became clear that the face-to-face aspect of the classroom was felt to be important

for oral and vocabulary work. The teachers' descriptions of their classrooms also align well with Holmqvist, Sullivan and Westum (2018). Although the teachers in our interviews did not articulate the mutual support and safe aspects as clearly as the teachers in Holmqvist *et al.*, the ethos of safe environments for learning and mutual support as a community was evident in our interviews. Moreover, it was clear the teachers aim to support student language learning, autonomy, and agency in the classroom and beyond.

Preparation for the shift to remote teaching

In our interviews we were interested to learn about preparation for the change to online teaching as this might help us construct a fuller understanding of the teachers' experiences and their perceptions of their students' experiences. Our interviews highlighted how preparation varied; variation is the only theme that arose from this part of the discussion. Teacher 1 reported that all the discussion in the media made them feel "something was about to happen, and perhaps soon in Sweden" yet they went on to say "we never thought we would be closed down in our little town, so it all felt irrelevant as it was Stockholm where people were ill". Teacher 2's school began to prepare, think and come up with ideas a few weeks before the decision. However the decision was immediate and "I had to rush to the photocopier and make lots of photocopies of grammar exercises and upload things to our teaching and learning platform". So neither of these teachers operationalized their thoughts into actual preparation. Teachers 3 and 4 were luckier as their schools closed for a week after the government's decision. These closures allowed time to plan how to move some elements of their classroom teaching to remote, online teaching. In summary, preparation for remote teaching was minimal, or non-existent. This needs to be borne in mind as we move to the consideration of the teachers' experiences of the move to online teaching occasioned by COVID-19.

Immediate impact on teaching and equity

Our analysis of the interview discussions on the immediate impact on teaching and equity showed how these teachers worked to overcome immediate difficulties. After some discussion we landed on two main themes: 1) experiencing negative impact, and 2) seeking creative solutions.

Experiencing negative impact

The move to remote teaching was not a simple change to an ICT-based teaching and learning platform. Such an immediate and total shift was impractical, not least as many of the beginner students were just learning to read and write, and some had not developed ICT skills. In these ways, these SFI students differ from the other groups of students the government had recommended study from home. These other students had advanced literacy and ICT skills from their years in compulsory school and beyond. A further challenge was some of the students in class lacked ICT hardware at home. Teacher 1 noted that many of the students use their mobile phones instead. Most worryingly for teaching quality and equity of education, Teacher 1 also notes that "some of them [the students] were about to give up; it was simply too hard for them to study on their own". The speed of the change meant the students were unprepared. It particularly disadvantaged the students who had no school experience, and who had just begun to study Swedish and could not yet communicate in the language, even at the most fundamental level.

Seeking creative solutions

In our interviews we encountered creative teachers seeking workable solutions and strategies to the challenges the move to online teaching posed. The teachers used a range of strategies to maintain contact with their students. We use the phrase 'maintain contact with' as the construction of the teacher's role that arises in our interviews encompasses more than the teaching of Swedish. Contact also supports the (re-)gaining of linguistic agency, and helps them become empowered individuals in society.

Keeping contact with the students via the telephone was the strategy Teacher 2 used initially. She would call all her students "every day in the morning" before they had lessons and explain what they were going to do on the teaching and learning platform. However, she soon realized that "it was not something I could maintain in the long-term. I did not have the time". As this teacher's school had been using a digital platform for several years, Teacher 2 immediately started holding online meetings with the students on *Zoom*. Even though she called the students before class as *Zoom* was new to the students, attendance was initially low and the students did not feel confident in speaking through this new medium: "only a few understood how it worked and some of them got a little scared and chose not to attend". However, after three weeks Teacher 2 managed to achieve full attendance: "I chased them up, sent SMSs" and she divided the group into smaller groups. In our conversation with this teacher we understand that keeping the group engaged is important, yet that this takes a lot of energy, and the teaching and learning becomes more mechanical and less constructed through social interaction.

Although Teacher 2 reflects that telephoning her students was not sustainable, Teacher 1 wished that she had done this, rather than emailed as she did immediately after the move to online teaching. After a while, she started meeting her students: "I have met a few students at a time in outdoor settings, where we can socially distance from each other". In this way, this teacher has worked around remote teaching, by creating small group physical meetings to maintain learning motivation. By continuing to meet her students, teacher one felt she created a space where her students could more easily discuss their problems with her, and so elements of the social experience of the classroom could be maintained.

The idea of meeting with students was also adopted by Teacher 3 and initially by Teacher 4, who later turned to telephone calls to her students' homes. However, these were another form of meeting to the ones set up by Teacher 2. From our discussion with Teacher 3 we understand that a key challenge was assuring the students understood what they were to study.

Teacher 3 walks around to her students' homes with each week's assignments and meets her students. However, unlike Teacher 2, this is more to assure the students know what to study. She talks with her students' children and their students' friends' children to make sure their students understand what they are expected to do. Teacher 4 also met her students during the first couple of weeks after the move to online teaching, but at the time of the interview mails out the week's assignments before telephoning her students. She reflects, "it has been hard to get them to understand the instructions". She telephones the students at home, but speaks with their children who have learnt Swedish more rapidly and say things like "it would be really good if you could read this with your mother". Hence, as part of their

workable solutions, our teachers adopted language brokering (e.g., Antonini, 2015; 2016) as one creative solution to assure that their students understood what they had to do each week. In sum, these teachers kept trialling different combinations of a wide range of communication possibilities thereby modelling an instantiation of agency to encourage and motivate their students to engage and continue learning Swedish.

Impact on Swedish speaking, listening, and conversational proficiency development

Our analysis of the interview discussions resulted in us understanding that teachers experienced the move to online teaching as making oral language work difficult. To overcome these difficulties, the teachers proposed to their students and families ways to work with language autonomy and to develop their home and community language practices. After discussion we developed three themes: 1) teaching oral proficiency is difficult, 2) meeting students (now and in the future), and 3) developing home language practices. Initially themes two and three were a single theme, developing language practices, but after discussion we decided the difference in time points is central to the description of the teachers' understandings.

Teaching oral proficiency is difficult

The interviewed teachers reported that teaching oral proficiency to the same standard as before the shift to online teaching is more difficult. It is this aspect of their teaching and the students' learning that the teachers think is suffering the most. Teacher 2 links the lack of physical classes and the spontaneous conversation this brings with her working less with the students' conversation skills and listening proficiency. She says, "Oral practice is one thing that we have done less of because of the circumstances. The natural and spontaneous dialogue disappeared, because everyone was tense and sat waiting for their turn, it got a little strained". From our discussions with the teachers, we understand that reduction of physical meetings affects all groups; the teacher of the most advanced group of SFI students highlights the importance meeting as a group for conversational proficiency development. As already mentioned, she meets her students in small groups in places they are able to socially distance. Even so, she feels these skills are neglected in her online teaching, "the practice of these skills has really been lacking. Perhaps the practice of listening skills has worked best since they can watch TV and listen to radio but speaking and conversation I haven't really done at all."

Meeting students (now and in the future)

Teacher 4, who meets her students in small groups in an outdoor context, would ideally meet her students individually to work on their oral and listening skills. She says, "if this continues after the summer vacation I would meet my students one by one and work with conversational practice. Then I could also give instructions to the week's assignments during the physical meeting". This desire to look forwards and work with students' oral proficiency skills in real life we understand as common to our four teachers. Teacher 1, for example, suggests that online videoconference platforms could be combined with some face-to-face meetings in a structured manner.

Developing home language practices

From our interview conversations with the teachers we came to understand they promote activities to support oral and listening proficiency development. Our teachers feel they can suggest changes to their students' home language practices. Teacher 4 is very clear when she says, "I have encouraged the student's children to speak Swedish with their parents." This we understand as an extension of language brokerage where the child no longer acts as an intermediary, but rather takes on the role of the more competent conversational partner. This is a role the parent usually takes in parent-child conversation, and thus this suggestion impacts on the agency and power of the parent and the child in relation to each other.

Impact on Swedish reading and writing proficiency development

Our analysis helped us realise teachers' experienced the move to online teaching as less problematic for teaching and supporting reading and writing development than oral proficiency development. Even so, the move introduced new challenges. After discussion we developed three themes: 1) working well, 2) grading, and 3) gaining from ICT for the future. In our discussions we also discussed the themes of family home literacies, and formative assessment, but in the end we placed these under the theme assessment challenges.

Working well

The interview discussions helped us understand that all teachers believed that online teaching and learning functions well for reading together. Indeed, as Teacher 2 says, "We have read during our *Zoom* meetings and I feel that all those who have attended these meetings have improved their reading".

Grading

At the same time as online teaching and learning functions well for reading together, we understand from our discussion with the teachers that grading written assignments creates challenges. One challenge, as illustrated by Teacher 1, is "students that never produced anything before now send in fantastic texts with no errors in either spelling or grammar". This teacher finds this a grading challenge. However, as the teachers encourage home family and community literacy practices, it is possible that a child has worked with their parents in the role of writing coach and teacher, and/or the students have met together and worked as critical friends during the writing process. Such practices are positive of language learning, even if they make the grading of individual students challenging.

Gains from ICT for the future

As our conversations developed in the interviews we gained an understanding of pushing advantages of remote teaching into the future. For example, Teacher 2 sees the value of using digital technologies and remote teaching, "Even if we open the school again this autumn, I will continue to use *Zoom* for extra classes, but attendance will be voluntary". Whereas, Teacher 3 wanted to complement remote teaching, if it continued, with one-on-one meetings. These meetings she felt would allow her "to better understand [student] needs and get them started on the tasks". This we understood from our conversations would make it possible to support students as they learn how to access and submit work for continuous assessment via teaching and learning platforms. We understood that the teachers feel

this would reduce one element of the assessment challenges that exist at the moment when teaching without formative assessment.

Socio-cultural and economic factors issues affecting equity of education

In the discussion around our previous topics, the interviewed teachers mentioned many interlinked socio-cultural and economic factors affecting their students' education after the shift to remote teaching that we have collected here, together with the teachers' final thoughts at the end of our interview conversations.

Teacher 1 reiterated that many of the students in the class did not have access to a computer, and working on a smartphone was not an ideal situation for the remote teaching of Swedish. She and Teacher 4 also mentioned that their students had children at home. This made studying more difficult. The teacher expressed this as follows, also hinting at how the fear of COVID-19 had affected these students' lives: "many of my students have said that they had problems with completing tasks since they had to have their children at home and not in childcare. We told them that they have the right to have their children in childcare, but they were scared that the children would get ill". Teacher 4 said that having children at home "probably affects their ability to study", yet at the same time this same teacher was making use of language brokering and using children to overcome some of the challenges of the shift to remote teaching. Three of the teachers perceived that the students felt isolated in their new country without school. Teacher 1 said that many of her students had said that they were lonely and felt isolated, Teacher 2 said that many of students in the class reported that they missed the social environment in the school, and Teacher 3 said: "Many of them say that they want to go back to school. They became isolated." This suggests that learning Swedish is not the only function of SFI, and the extra social dimensions were lost due to the shift to remote teaching.

Thus, in sum, our understanding is that the teachers' perceived the move to online teaching occasioned by COVID-19 challenged equity of education by the removal of the social experience of being on campus and in the classroom. Teacher 1 articulated that "some of her students were beginning to give up, as it was simply too difficult to manage studying on their own...it is obvious that remote teaching does not work for most of the students studying SFI".

Discussion and conclusion

The findings we have presented cannot be considered representative of how all SFI teachers understand and experience the sudden shift to remote teaching due to COVID-19 and the over-night closing of adult education. However, the data we have found allows understandings of this shift. Together with the teachers we have been able to construct understandings of particular moments, contexts and events that may resonant in other contexts, including those experiencing a total lockdown and in contexts where teachers of immigrants in rural and non-rural areas are considering integrating remote digital elements into their courses. The topics we discussed with these teachers also point to, and open up, areas worthy of future investigation.

We ended the results section with a quote from Teacher 1, "it is obvious that remote teaching does not work for most of the students studying SFI", and we titled this research article "New-arrivals challenged

by remote teaching: creating solutions during the Covid-19 pandemic.” In this discussion and conclusion section we consider how our illustrative cases permit an understanding that allows new(-er) solutions that might turn Teacher 1’s view to “remote teaching works for most”? We start by considering the ways in which our four teachers of SFI were creative as they attempted to maintain equality in their teaching after it moved online due to Swedish COVID-19 guidelines. Our teachers are innovative educators. They telephoned, texted, visited their students’ homes, emailed out materials, and met the students outdoors, as well as using online teaching and learning platforms, and *Zoom*. These teachers were not trained to use the full-range of digital teaching technology affordances. It would be useful to audit what support these teachers would appreciate in their learning of how to teach with these tools. We gained an understanding that our teachers felt that they were mitigating their own and their students’ inexperience in using digital tools by combining online teaching with traditional in-person teaching and communication approaches. We also suggest that the ideas of post-digital education (e.g., Jandrić, Knox, Besley, Ryberg, Suoranta, and Hayes, 2018) are introduced in courses and workshops for teachers moving to remote and online teaching. Post-digital education argues that digital learning always takes place in the midst of other material practices, or as Jandrić *et al.* (2018) write, “We are increasingly no longer in a world where digital technology and media is separate, virtual, ‘other’ to a ‘natural’ human and social life” (p. 893). If we view education in this way, what our teachers understand as ameliorating limitations in digital education, become core educational elements for supporting student learning.

Our teachers reduced the conversational and oral proficiency elements of their language teaching. Some of our teachers worked to overcome this reduction by meeting their students and by encouraging younger family members to talk Swedish with the parents or older relatives. Both of these approaches have value, even if suddenly talking Swedish with a younger family member or relative can feel very unnatural when another language is the usual mode of communication. The uptake of these suggestions by the students is, however, unknown. Waldmann and Sullivan (2019) investigated the materiality of mobile digital video chat programs for supporting young learner language development. They argue that the materiality of the mobile digital video chat effectively supports participation, engagement and language learning. Viewing oral language proficiency and conversation skill development for immigrants in a similar frame may help both teachers and students access the materiality of video chat better. This is an area of immigrant language teaching that warrants research and has the potential to support oral language skill development among immigrants in rural areas where authentic conversational opportunities may be lower than in a metropolitan area.

A challenge that penetrated much of the interview conversations was our teachers’ perceptions of the impact of the move to online teaching on their students’ language learning agency and autonomy. The teachers felt that these aspects were beginning to emerge in Swedish through their on-campus SFI classes with their elements of communicative and social support. Yet once the shift to remote teaching occurred, these students lost these social aspects. The teachers’ perceptions are that their students also lost language learning agency and autonomy. The teachers reacted by creating many ways to keep in contact with their students, including visiting and creating small face-to-face socially distanced

meetings. These approaches, the teachers suggest, could continue even if teaching moves back to campus. In particular they are considering blended teaching for their classes with smaller on-line groups, especially for conversation classes, and the continued use of *Zoom*, including for one-to-one conversations. However, the teachers also feel that distance teaching alone is not sufficient to support the social function of their courses.

An area that the teachers highlight is the use of language brokering and family home literacy practices. Our teachers explicitly encourage language brokering, but we detect a slight mistrust for some home literacy practices when this results in perfect assignments. How home literacy practices support learning among students of Swedish of Immigrants is an avenue worthy of future research, as are how these practices develop in relation to mode of course delivery, and the impact of language brokering and family home literacy practices on the students' and their children's autonomy, agency and power in their new country.

In summary, remote teaching does challenge new-arrival SFI students, yet teachers are creating new solutions. Unfortunately, it became clear during the interviews that our teachers had not been trained to use available digital tools, nor were they offered on-the-job training after the move to remote teaching occasioned by COVID-19. Such support may have allowed even more creative solutions. Online beginners language teaching has been shown to be successful in many settings, but generally with literate students, and there is much that can be transferred from these settings. However, the understanding we constructed based on our interviews is that remote teaching is not sufficient to fully support the education and social function of SFI courses. At the minimum some degree of face-to-face teaching and group conversation is necessary to maintain student engagement and motivation for learning Swedish. We suggest that the teachers are supported in developing their remote teaching skills and that with some face-to-face elements, remote teaching will work for this group of students.

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