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Caring and Learning Together: A Case Study of Sweden

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UNESCO Education Sector

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About the Report

The present report was commissioned by UNESCO within the framework of the *Caring and Learning Together: a Cross-National Study on the Integration of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) within Education*, implemented as part of its 2008-2009 biennial programme. The study examines the policy of integrating ECCE within the education system, which is being adopted in a growing number of countries. It aims to generate a better understanding of the policy by looking at the experiences of five countries – Brazil, Jamaica, New Zealand, Slovenia and Sweden – and one municipality – Ghent in Belgium Flanders – which have chosen this option. The study also looks at why other countries have not followed this course of action. It offers an assessment of integration-within-education, and provides key policy insights and recommendations on the subject.

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The present report on the integration of early childhood education and care services under the Ministry of Education and Science auspice in Sweden is a continuation of the previous report Consolidating Governmental Early Childhood Education and Care Services Under the Ministry of Education and Science: A Swedish Case Study (Lenz Taguchi and Munkhammar, 2003¹). We recommend that the reader take note of the previous report in order to understand and obtain a holistic view of the integration process in Sweden. This report presents the continuing development in the integration of early childhood education and care from 2003 to 2008. Specifically, it describes (i) the process and transition at local level, (ii) consolidation and new reforms, (iii) consequences of integration, and (iv) lessons, implications and remaining challenges.

1. Introduction

The Swedish pre-school model has historically been based on the theory that a child's preconditions for development and learning are largely influenced by the social environment and the pedagogical stimulation that a child encounters during his or her childhood years. One important step for the pre-school's incorporation into the education system was the introduction of the first curriculum for pre-school (Lpfö 98, 1998). The curriculum strengthens the view of a child continuously developing and learning in all contexts and not just in specially selected situations. The curriculum states that the pre-school assignment is comprehensive and wide. The pre-school is founded on a holistic view of the child where different aspects of child's development and learning are closely integrated to each other. This means that pre-schooling should be organized so that learning, care and upbringing should be interwoven into daily pedagogical practice and form an entirety. In this report we will use the concept "educare" when we refer to the holistic view of a child in the Swedish pre-school tradition.

Organization/administration of ECEC

The Ministry of Education and Research is organized into five divisions. Early Childhood Care and Education (ECEC) is in the Divisions for Schools in which these questions are administrated. The National Agency for Education receives commissions through governmental approval documents. In addition to these it receives other commissions, such as for curriculum revision. Within the National Agency for Education there is a Division for Education, within which there is a subdivision responsible for questions about ECEC.

2. Process and transition at local level

The aim of the reform was that pre-schools, schools and leisure-time centres should be integrated in order to enhance the quality of both pre-school and school. The pedagogical

¹ Available on <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0013/001301/130135e.pdf>

role of the pre-school should be strengthened while at the same time its pedagogical approach should be given greater influence within the school. After the decision to integrate pre-school under the Ministry of Education and Science, an important step was the introduction of the Curriculum for pre-school (Lpfö 98, 1998). The curriculum is an ordinance and is binding for all pre-schools. The maximum fee reform and the right for all Swedish children aged four to attend pre-school for 525 hours per year at no cost, was also implemented in the pre-school area. The aim of such reform is to make pre-school more accessible, and for a life long learning perspective to be a right for all children. The National Agency for Education carried out an evaluation in 2004 (Skolverket 2004). The evaluation shows that the intention to bring about a closer link between pre-school and school has had a major impact in terms of its organization and management at local level. The majority of the municipalities in the case study were organized into joint board and administration, Childcare and Education Committee and Departments. It was also common for the municipalities to govern pre-schools and schools with joint school plans and local municipality goals. A far reaching decentralisation of responsibility and decision making in a number of central areas was also seen in many of the municipalities. Decisions concerning group size, children with special needs, planning time and competence development for the staff were accomplished at local level. It has also become more common that the local department handle the funding directly for the principals to distribute to their pre-schools.

In 2008 the National Agency for Education carried out a second evaluation, ten years after the reform (Skolverket 2008a). The evaluation pointed out that responsibility for pre-school since 1990 has become more and more decentralised and that funding is, to a larger extent, distributed directly at the local level. This means that pre-school principals have greater freedom in relation to decisions on funding and the redistribution of different forms of activities. The municipalities governing group size has decreased since the previous evaluation in 2004. Along with decentralisation come requirements for control. The municipality has increased the governing and control of pre-school. Today it has more say over the evaluation and self-evaluation activities in pre-schools. To support such evaluations the National Agency for Education brought out a guideline for quality work at pre-school level (Skolverket, 2005b). To support such quality work the National Agency for Education initiated and partly financed a development project on quality work in pre-school in numerous municipalities between 2006 and 2007.

3. Consolidation and new reforms

Consolidation of maximum fee reform and universal pre-school

The period after the decision in 1996 to integrate early childhood education and care within the compulsory school system under the Ministry of Education and Science is characterised as a period of reforms (Martin Korpi, 2006). The Government submitted a bill in May 2000 to the Swedish parliament, the Riksdag, “Maximum fee and universal pre-school and related matters” (Bill 1999/2000:129). The proposal caused an intense political and media-covered debate. The Minister for Schools drove the question of universal pre-school (Martin Korpi, 2006). The Ministry of Finance was also involved because of questions about insufficient financing for providing the reform. The Social

Democrat Government considered that pre-school is part of general welfare. Pre-school should be offered to every child from an early age. No child should be excluded from early learning and development because of high fees or if one parent is unemployed or is on parental leave (Budget Bill 2003/04:1).

The maximum fee reform and universal pre-school was introduced in three stages between 2001 and 2003 (Martin Korpi, 2006; Lenz Taguchi & Munkhammar, 2003). It was of great importance that the maximum fee should not jeopardise quality in pre-schooling. Each municipality had to decide if they wanted to apply a maximum fee. They received two central government grants if they chose to do so. One of the grants was introduced for quality assurance measures. Since 2003 all municipalities in Sweden apply a system with a maximum fee.

There are no signs yet in political documents of any aim towards entirely free pre-school.

Quality at a pre-school level

The Social Democrat Government stated that there had been great changes in pre-schooling and in school-aged care during the last decade (Budget Bill 2003/2004). Several reforms have had an effect on and partly changed the activity. After the maximum fee and universal pre-school reform the Government declared that questions of quality were to be the highest priority over the following years. In September 2004 the Swedish Government submitted a bill to the Riksdag on the principles of quality at pre-school, "Quality at pre-school" (2004/05:11). In the bill, the Government showed their proposals and assessments concerning quality and development for pre-school. The bill from 2004, "Quality at pre-school", was passed and the Swedish National Agency for Education has issued guidelines for quality (2005b). The essential content of this bill is presented in the following paragraphs.

The pre-school as a unique type of school

The government bill "Quality at pre-school" (2004/05:11) declares that the pre-school's commission, in accordance to the curriculum, (Lpfö 98, 1998) should remain unchanged and continue to give children good care while providing educational stimuli and promoting good conditions for growth. Pre-school ought to be a unique type of school in the Swedish school system. Today the national school system consists of many different types of schools, such as pre-school class, compulsory basic, upper secondary school, special school principally for pupils with impaired hearing/vision and speech disabilities, schools for the mentally disabled and Sami school. These types of schools concern different target groups, regulation and other concerns distinctive to the type of school. In addition to such types of school the state also provides pedagogical activities in the form of pre-school activities, leisure-time centres and welfare for schoolchildren. But the meaning of welfare for schoolchildren is not defined in the government bill.

The aim of constituting pre-school as a unique type of school is to further emphasize pre-school as the first step in a lifelong learning perspective and a valid part of the school system while having the same comprehensive goals as other kinds of schools. But the

intention is not to change the pre-school's commission. A parliamentary committee was set up in 1999 to make an overhaul of the 1985 Education Act (1985: 1100)². In its report "Education Act for Quality and Equivalence" (SOU 2002:121) it suggested far-reaching proposals for integrating pre-school into the Education Act with an aim to providing common legislation for all major concerns regarding all type of schools, even at pre-school level. Regulation concerning the school system in the Education Act could then also be applied at pre-school, for example comprehensive goals, quality assurance, education management, staff requirement, premises for children in need of special support. The committee also recommended, for example, that concepts like *school*, *teaching* and *pupil* should be used even in the contexts of pre-school and leisure-time centres (SOU 2002:121; Lenz Taguchi & Munkhammar, 2003). The Government's judgment in "Quality at pre-school" is that pre-school should not just simply take on school terminology. The concept *pupil* should not concern pre-school. If the term *teaching* should include pre-school, the definition of teaching must be adjusted to pre-school as well as to school. The Social Democratic Government meant to return the government bill to the Riksdag with the proposal of a new Education Act also containing the definition of such concepts. But the political discussions over the general content of "Education Act for Quality and Equivalence" took a long time and no government bill was passed during the Social Democrat Government. When the new Government, constituted of the Moderate Party, Liberal Party, Centre Party and Christian Democrats, came to power in Sweden in the autumn of 2006, the question of a new Education Act was something it wanted to work on further before presenting a government bill. It was originally to have been presented in the spring of 2009, but as yet it has not yet been done so.

Leadership at pre-school

At present, a municipal committee within the municipality has responsibility for leadership at pre-school. This is regulated by the Local Government Act (1991:900). The municipal committee makes decision about the delegation and responsibility of leadership at pre-schools. Such leadership responsibility for pre-school has not been regulated within the Social Services Act (1980:620) and is not regulated either in the Education Act (1985:1100). 96 % of Swedish municipalities have a joint committee for pre-school and school, often named the Childcare and Education committee. A majority of the Swedish municipalities (98 %) also has a joint department. The organization of municipalities is constantly developing and changing. There is, therefore, a great variation on how leadership in pre-schools is organized. In some municipalities there is a head only for pre-schools, named the pre-school leader or principal. In other municipalities there is a head both for pre-school and school called the principal.

In "Quality at pre-school" (2004/05:11), the Government declared that pre-school should have the same leadership as other type of schools in order to confirm pre-school as a valid part of the school system, to strengthen its quality and equivalence, and to emphasize pre-school as a unique of school. The leader's responsibility should be regulated within the Education Act. A principal should have local responsibility for the pre-school and, together with the staff, develop activities in relation to the Education Act,

² There have been several changes of paragraphs and additional paragraphs have been added to the now validated Education Act of 1985 (1985: 1100).

the curriculum and other constitutions. It is also fair to have joint regulation and to give equal conditions to every head in the organization as pre-school and school are mostly part of the same department. It is therefore natural that the leaders of pre-school and school have the same appellation, responsibility and authority irrespective of how activities are organized. Uniform leadership in all types of school ought to support and facilitate integration between pre-school, pre-school class, school and leisure time centre, as well as supporting the development of an overall view of children's and young people's development and learning. The priority for a principal's commission should be norms and values, systematic quality work, quality reports and leadership of staff, always with the aim of challenging the activity and supporting pedagogical development in all matters. The principal should, through his or her education and experience, have pedagogical insight. The Government thought that this was fundamental and should be clearly stated in the law. State and municipality have a joint responsibility to educate and regularly develop competent principals. But how the principal's area of responsibility is organized in detail should also in the future be up to the municipality.

A central grant for staff increase

The Government proposed that special state grants would be allocated to municipalities over a period of three years in order to increase pre-school staff, with 6000 additional pre-school teachers, child-care attendants and other staff, as the Government had proposed in the Budget Bill for 2005 (2004/2005:1). It was up to each municipality to decide which staff category to occupy and to which pre-schools they directed the additional contribution. The municipalities were to give annual reports on how they had used the state grant. The Swedish National Agency for Education were granted the commission to administrate and decide if the state grant to municipalities had been used in accordance with the given goals and outlines for the central grant. They should also deliver a complete follow-up report to the Government after every budget of how the central grant had been used.

The staff at pre-school

Pre-school teachers should have received a university teaching education. These teachers should have comprehensive responsibility for children's development and learning. In addition there could be other persons in the staff with education or experience, promoting children's development and learning. Child-care attendants were seen as an important group.

The staff in the pre-school has contributed to what the Swedish pre-school is today – unique and respected around the world for its specific identity. Pre-school teachers and child-care attendants contribute to laying the foundation of a girl's or a boy's learning. At pre-school staff work together as a team with a comprehensive view on the children and their development and learning. A pedagogical activity has been shaped in which care, social education and learning are integrated (Quality at pre-school, government bill 2004/05:11, p 40).

The Government considered that there was a need for clarity and specificity regarding the staff's responsibility. A regulation should be initiated requiring that there should be

teachers with a university teaching education at pre-school. The teachers should have comprehensive responsibility for the activity corresponding to goals for pre-school and for satisfying children's needs. The aim was to strengthen the quality of the pedagogical work at pre-school. Other staff besides the teachers in pre-schools ought to be regulated under the Education Act. The Government meant that both pre-school teachers and care minders were needed in pre-schools. But nothing in "Quality at pre-school" was said about the proportion of pre-school teachers and child-care attendants.

The committee's recommendation in the "Education Act for Quality and Equivalence" (SOU 2002:121) to use the concept *teaching* even in pre-school and leisure-time centres meant that teaching there should be seen in the same formal way as in other types of school. A natural consequence of such a suggestion is that the regulations required for a university teacher education and qualifications for employment should be valid even for pre-school teachers and leisure-time pedagogues. This means that the demand for a university teaching education is a main requirement even for pre-school. The committee also said that there could be personnel in the staff with other education or experience. In the government bill "Quality at pre-school" one can see almost the same written documents. Decentralisation implies freedom for the municipalities to decide how to delegate staff. One of the consequences of the committee's recommendation was that many Swedish municipalities offer competence development for child-care attendants to pre-school teachers as an essential part of increasing the quality in pre-school. The Government's intention was to come back to the Riksdag with the proposal of a new Education Act with suggestion of a legal text about the personnel in pre-schools.

The latest statistics show that 54 % of pre-school staff in year 2007 were pre-school teachers, compared with 2002 when 51 % were pre-school teachers (Skolverket 2008b).

Family day care and open pre-school

If parents prefer to opt for family day care instead of pre-school, the municipality ought to satisfy their needs without replacing pre-school with other forms of activity against the parents' wishes. Family day care should be regulated as a pedagogical activity without a curriculum and not be considered a separate type of school. But the curriculum (Lpfö 98, 1998) should be a guide for family day care. In the existing Education Act, open pre-school is defined as a complementary pre-school activity. The numerous open pre-schools have decreased. Some municipalities no longer have a single open pre-school. Since the start of 1990 open pre-schools cooperate in many places with the health and welfare services. The Swedish National Agency for Education has as a governmental commission issued guidelines for open pre-school (2000). The Government considers that open pre-schools are an important part of pre-school activity and a valuable complement to pre-school. Family day care should therefore be made properly visible through regulation within the Education Act.

Multi-cultural pre-school

The Swedish National Agency for Education showed in a report, "Many languages – many possibilities" (2002) that support for mother tongue language at pre-school had

greatly decreased. Their inspections of pre-schools also showed that on this issue several municipalities did not live up to the pre-school's commission, formulated in the curriculum. In the bill, "Quality at pre-school", the Government's estimation is that the multi-cultural perspective in the pre-school curriculum (Lpfö 98, 1998) should be made clearer, the intention being to strengthen both children's linguistic and identity development, especially for children with an other mother tongue than Swedish.

The equivalent pre-school

One important stage in the reform of transferring pre-schooling and school-age child care from the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs to the Ministry of Education and Science was the introduction of the curriculum for pre-school (Lpfö 98, 1998), which is binding for all pre-schools. The curriculum aims at creating conditions for an equivalent high quality pre-school with activities framed in direct response to fundamental democratic values. The equivalence perspective is expressed as follows in the curriculum (Lpfö 98, 1998):

The pre-school shall, irrespective of where it is located, work in order to attain the goals set up for the pedagogical activity. Care for the individual child's well-being, security, development and learning shall characterise the work in the pre-school. Consideration must be taken of children's varying conditions and needs. This means that the activity cannot be organized in the same way everywhere, and that the pre-school's resources therefore shall not be distributed equally (p 4).

Evaluations by the Swedish National Agency for Education (2004; 2008a) show that there exist variations between municipalities in different areas but especially between pre-schools within the same municipality. Pre-schools within the same municipality often work under different conditions, i.e. a variation in child group sizes and number of children in need of special support. Pre-schools situated in low income socio-economic areas often had more difficulties in implementing their tasks in a satisfactory way than pre-schools in high resource areas. In a decentralised organization there is a risk that when municipalities allocate resources they take little account of that pre-school's work under different conditions. But seen from an international perspective the Swedish National Agency for Education states, with reference to Bertram, T. & Pascal, C. (2002), that equivalence in the Swedish pre-school is high in many respects.

Evaluations and inspections by the Swedish National Agency for Education also show that very little attention is paid to equivalence when 77 per cent of the municipalities give priority to questions about norms and values. Equivalence is hardly expressed when the staff gives examples of their work with norms and values. They referred to a research study (Månsson, 2000) showing that staff treat boys and girls differently. The Government considers that work for equal opportunities is of great importance for the quality of pre-school. Equal opportunities are questions of democracy and power. Knowledge at pre-school on how gender patterns are made and maintained ought therefore to be broadened and intensified.

Parents at pre-school — co-operation and influence

Parental co-operation at pre-school has a long tradition and is one of the corner stones of pedagogy at pre-school. In spite of that, the Social Democratic Government considered that if pre-school was now to become a separate type of school, the dialogue on development should be more distinctly regulated than it had been, and that it should be included in the Education Act. Besides current dialogues in daily meetings and other organized parental activities in pre-schools, staff and children's guardians should meet at least twice a year to discuss the child's development and learning both inside and outside the pre-school. Pre-school teachers should have comprehensive responsibility for organizing such discussions. Such dialogue is also an occasion for staff and parents to discuss questions about special support if required. The Government's intention was that pre-school staff should have support in developing forms of dialogue at pre-school and so included this point in the commission they handed to the Swedish National Agency for Education to work out guidelines.

The possibility of increasing parental and child influence at pre-school should be strengthened. The Government had observed that there was a stagnation in working on broadening and developing such an influence. In the proposal "Education Act for Quality and Equivalence" (SOU 2002:121) it returned to the Riksdag with question about developing dialogues and influence.

Systematically assessing work quality

The Swedish Government decided that it was very important to systematically assess the quality of work both in pre-school activities and in care for school children. The quality of the work should be documented in order to support local improvements, dialogue between staff and parents, between the activity and the municipal authority but also with the aim of creating national equivalence. To emphasize this, the Government introduced an obligation for pre-schooling and care for school children to make annual quality reports such as those schools were already required to produce since 1998. It was also included in the commission they gave to the Swedish National Agency for Education to work out guidelines. The guidelines should be formulated as tools for quality reports. The changes in the Education Act (1985:1100) came into force on the 1st of April 2005.

Summary of reforms concerning quality

As shown above, the bill "Quality at pre-school" (2004/05:11), dealt with many quality issues. The content of the decisions can be summarized as follows:

- An earmarked central grant of 5 billion to the municipalities, distributed over three years starting January 2005, for staff increase. After the three years the central grant was included within the general state grant. The money corresponded to the cost of increasing the staff by 10 per cent (Martin Korpi, 2006).
- A decision on requirements for annual quality reports in pre-schooling and school-aged care, as at school.

- The bill also dealt with questions about the role of pre-school in a future Education Act. But the Minister did not propose any change in the tasks of pre-school concerning the use of terms originating from the school world, rather than from pre-school (Martin Korpi, 2006).
- A very important issue relating to quality was the meaning of pre-school as a unique type of school. Municipalities can not in the future deny a family a place at a pre-school and offer day care instead.
- Special work on legislation concerning different staff categories resulted in the principle that there must be pre-school teachers in all pre-schools. The teachers should have comprehensive responsibility for pedagogical work. Child-care attendants and other staff should also be a part of the work team (Martin Korpi, 2006).
- The Ministry also gave priority to questions concerning the pedagogical content in pre-school such as gender equivalence and multiculturalism. A delegation for the allocation of funds for developing projects on gender equality was established. The curriculum would be strengthened for children with another mother tongue than Swedish (Martin Korpi, 2006).
- The commission of the Swedish National Agency for Education to work on guidelines for quality resulted in three publications:
 - “Quality at pre-school” (2005b)
 - “Quality report” (2006c)
 - “Quality at leisure-time centres” (2007b)

A new Government with new reforms

In autumn 2006 there was a change on the political arena. A new Government came to power in Sweden. Four parties, the Moderate Party, Liberal Party, Centre party and Christian Democrats, agreed on establishing a Government with the aim to renewing Sweden, as proclaimed in the governmental statement (2006). It said that a modern family policy realizes that all families are different and that they have varying wishes and needs. Parents know their children best and therefore they must be given greater opportunities to choose the type of pre-school and child care, precisely suiting their children and their situation. The Government’s ambition was to implement a new family policy to promote freedom of choice, greater gender equality, more diversity in the pre-school and child care system and more time with children. In short their ambitions in the area of family politics were as follows:

- to introduce a new child care payment scheme giving parents more freedom to make their own child care choices
- the obligation for municipalities to offer child care was to be continued, and they were to receive more resources for such
- the maximum fee remained, but was to be reduced at leisure-time centres
- universal pre-school was to be expanded to include three year old children. As the child develops, so the pedagogical commission for pre-school is strengthened
- municipalities were free to introduce child-care allowance, meaning that parents could stay at home for longer periods or reduce their time at work

Such ambitions were expressed in the budget bill for 2008/09, in which the Government declared that it was going to strengthen the pedagogical commission for pre-school. In March 2008 the Government submitted two bills to the Swedish Riksdag; “Child-care Allowance – a family political reform” (2007/08:91) and “Bonus for Equality – a family political reform” (2007/08:93). Both reforms were co-ordinated with a governmental brief.

When the Government submitted the Budget Bill for 2009 to the Swedish Riksdag in September 2008 it showed that it was to follow up its governmental statement with three initiatives; reinforced pedagogical commission, universal pre-school from the age of three and the introduction of child care allowance.

In June 2007 the Government appointed a special commissioner to work on suggestions for a new teacher-training programme. The Inquiry presented their report, entitled “Sustainable teacher education” (SOU 2008:109), in early December 2009.

Reinforced pedagogical commission

In the Budget Bill for 2009 the Government's intention is to strengthen the pre-schools' pedagogical commission with an aim to better preparing children for school. This means concretely that the aims of the curriculum should be elucidated, especially children's linguistic and mathematical development. It should make continuous learning in playful forms possible and be built on children's interests, needs, conditions and development. The Government's ambition is that there shall be pre-school teachers in every pre-school and that pre-school teachers shall be given a comprehensive pedagogical responsibility for learning. Pre-school teachers and child care attendants shall have the possibility to strengthen their competence through the introduction of special further education. The total budget for the proposals is 600 million SEK over the period 2009-2011. The Swedish National Agency for Education asked the commission to propose clarification and completion of some of the goals. The suggestions were to be based on research and reliable experience. In short, The Swedish National Agency for Education should propose clarification of the following areas in the curriculum:

- goals for developing children's linguistic and mathematical development
- the pre-school teachers' educational responsibility
- the importance of follow-ups and evaluations of the pre-school's activity

They should also:

- suggest achievements directed to personnel in the pre-school about achieving the clarified curriculum
- emphasize the need for continuing education and competence development, with a focus on pre-school teachers, relating to the proposals

The commission was to be produced in co-operation with experts on children's development and learning and pre-school pedagogy and with the support of as many relevant actors in the area as possible. The Swedish National Agency for Education were to present their suggestions on clarification of the curriculum to the Ministry in March

2009 and the whole commission at the latest at the end of September 2009.

Universal pre-school from the age of three

Pre-school shall be open to every child without distinction of where they live and what their family situation may be. Through a universal pre-school system, without fees and from the age of three, more children have access to a pedagogical activity than previously. The decision for universal pre-school means the right of all Swedish children aged three and upwards to attend pre-school for 525 hours per year (3 hours per day). The Government intention is to make this possible from July 2010 at a cost of 220 million SEK and then annually with 440 million SEK. The Municipalities are responsible for arranging universal pre-school which is extended to providing places in pre-school from the autumn term onwards for children who are three years old that year. The municipalities will be compensated for these expenses. It is suggested that the amendment come into force on the 1st of July 2009. While attendance is voluntary for the children, the provision of the services is mandatory for the municipalities. This decision will come into force in July 2010.

Child care allowance

Freedom of choice and manifold pre-schooling and care for school children ought to increase. A child allowance increases parents' possibilities to choose the best form of activity that is suited for their children. The municipalities are obliged to give grants for private family day care, multifamily systems and other pedagogical forms of activity. The Government's intention is that this child allowance shall be introduced from the 1st of July 2009 at a cost of 135 million SEK and from 2010 at an annual cost of 220 million SEK.

A new teacher-training programme

In its report, "Sustainable teacher education" (SOU 2008:109), the inquiry presents its analysis relating to the levels of competence required of teachers, resulting in proposals on three levels:

- There should be four perspectives forming an integral part of all teacher education:
 - a scientific and critical approach
 - a historical perspective
 - an international perspective
 - information and communications technology (ICT) as an educational resource
- A common core of knowledge and skills will guarantee that teachers are well-prepared to meet the demands of the profession.
- Specific competence.

From the commissioner's point of view, to be a professional teacher for a special form of school, the teacher education programme must provide a specific competence. Belonging to a profession does not only mean being a teacher, one must be a teacher with a special orientation to a special age group or to a subject unit. Table below, taken from

“Sustainable teacher education” (SOU 2008:109), shows an outline of the proposed new teacher education.

Table: An outline of the new teacher education

Professional qualification	Primary school teacher				Secondary school teacher				
	Specialisation for pre-school	Specialisation for pre-school – year 3	Specialisation on 4 -6	Specialisation on out-of-school-centre	Specialisation on 7-9	Special upper secondary + Adult	Specialisation on practical and artistic subjects	Vocational subjects Upper Secondary and Adult	Alternative entry
Out of school-centres									
Pre-school									
Pre-school class									
1									
2									
3									
4									
5									
6									
7									
8									
9									
Upper secondary 1									
Upper secondary 2									
Upper secondary 3									
Length of programme	3 years	4 years	4 years	4 years	4 years	5 years	4 years	1.5 years	1.5 years
General qualifications	Bachelor degree	Master degree	Master degree	Master degree	Master degree	Master degree	Master degree	Higher education qualification	

The education for a primary school teacher has four specialisations; specialisation for pre-school, specialisation for pre-school class and years 1-3 of compulsory school, specialisation for years 4-6 of compulsory school and specialisation for the out-of-school centre (= leisure-time centre). The education for a secondary school teacher has five specialisations. Primary school teachers are qualified to teach in many subjects which specifically lay the foundations for reading, writing and arithmetic skills, but also in other

areas. Two new professional degrees, namely the primary school teaching qualification and the secondary school teaching qualification, are proposed to replace the present teaching qualification. Sweden will, like several other countries, have two teaching degrees, bachelor and master degrees.

The grey fields marked in table 1 show that the pre-school specialisation can be supplemented by one year's supplementary training for teaching pre-school classes and that the year 7-9 specialisation can be supplemented by one year's supplementary training for teaching a third subject.

In the Inquiry on a new teacher education programme the arguments for reducing the length and qualifications of pre-school teachers is not so distinctly addressed. But one can discover at least some of the reasons for this. In spite of the intention in the curriculum for pre-school (Lpfö98, 1998) one can see the beginnings of a political expression with a main focus on pre-school as a service for care. In the proposal on content for specialisation at pre-school the concept "learning" is infrequently used. The main focus on learning and also learning related to school subjects will be concentrated in the specialisation on pre-school - year 3 and the training education is therefore four years' long. The Inquiry shows that Sweden today educates too few pre-school teachers to meet the demand. A shortened education may be seen as a solution to that.

4. Consequences of integration

Evaluation of the changeover

There have been two national evaluations, both done by the Swedish National Agency for Education (Skolverket 2004a, 2008a), since the reform in 1998 when pre-schools were provided with a curriculum and became the first step in the educational system for children and youth. The Swedish National Agency for Education was also commissioned by the Government in 2001 to follow up and evaluate the maximum fee reform and universal pre-school. Their task also included following up a grant for quality assurance measures in pre-school activity and child care for school children. The Swedish National Agency for Education has delivered four interim reports (Skolverket, 2003, 2004b, 2005a, 2006b) and a final report (Skolverket, 2007a).

The Swedish National Agency for Education found that the effects of the maximum reform are in many ways in accordance with the goals and intentions of the bill "Maximum fee and universal pre-school and related matters" (1999/2000:129). They note, however, that it is important to safeguard quality issues. The reform can by extension lead to some negative effects on activities caused by expanded availability, for example children's needs for a secure environment and continuity.

Impact on affordability and access

The reform introducing a maximum fee and universal pre-school and related matters was an important reform for two main reasons (Martin Korpi, 2006). It was of great support for the financial position of families with children; the reform gave recognition to pre-schooling and school-aged child care. Childcare and a lifelong learning became a truly fundamental part of general welfare that would benefit all children since fees were either low or non-existent (Korpi, 2006). The reform has considerably increased accessibility to pre-school and after-school services.

Evaluations have shown that more children now have access to pre-school (Skolverket, 2003, 2004b, 2005a, 2006b, 2007a). Waiting lists have not increased, contrary to what critics of the reform had initially predicted (Martin Korpi, 2006). In 2005 the number of children registered at pre-school had increased to 77 per cent from 68 per cent the year before when the reform was implemented. 95 per cent of children aged four to six were at a pre-school. The maximum fee reform led to a major improvement in the finances of family with children. Fees for child care have hardly changed and are indeed the same as in the beginning of the 1990s. Calculated as it is on the percentage of a salary, low income single parents are those who benefit most from the maximum fee reform. The reform has supported families with low income and single parent families. An important step towards equality and encouraging social inclusion was:

- The right for children of unemployed parents to obtain and keep a place in pre-school they may already have; and
- Children's right to continue being at pre-school even when their parents are at home, under the parental insurance scheme for taking care of another child.

With an increased focus on the educational content of pre-school the maximum fee reform has strengthened the role of pre-school as a part of lifelong learning and as the first step in the educational system.

Impact on the proportion of children enrolled in pre-school and leisure-time centres

In pre-school the proportion of enrolled children has increased in all municipality groups during the period (Skolverket, 2007a). In 2005 about 90 % of 4 to 5 years old were enrolled in pre-school. This increase has been greater in some municipalities than in others, which means that the proportion of enrolled children has become more regularly distributed between municipalities in Sweden since the introduction of the maximum free reform. The significance of different background factors in relation to pre-school participation (for instance depending on which municipality the family lives, parent's employment and foreign background) has decreased during the reform period. Both the proportion and the number of children in family day care have decreased. Even the proportion of children enrolled in leisure-time centres has increased during the period, but the variation between municipalities has not decreased in the same way for pre-school and family day care.

Impact for the municipalities

The maximum fee and universal pre-school reforms initially led to a relatively small increase in the number and proportion of children. The reason for this is that a high proportion of four- and five-year olds were already enrolled in a pre-school activity before universal pre-school came into effect.

The majority of municipalities offer only the statutory 15 hours per week for pre-school activity for children of unemployed parents and parents on parental leave (Skolverket, 2007a). Most of these children, together with the four and five year old children whose parents only use their legal right to cost-free pre-school of 525 hours per year, are integrated within the ordinary pre-school. But there are also municipalities organising special groups for these children. About 10 % of the municipalities organize activities for “fifteen-hour” children in special groups. The increase in availability and “fifteen-hour” proportion has sometimes led to changed conditions for children, for staff and for the activity in the pre-school. The variations between and within municipalities are great and therefore it is not possible to give any general pictures of the effects of such initiatives (Skolverket, 2007a). As a result of their evaluation the Swedish National Agency for Education points out that there is, within the existing legislation, a margin in which municipalities are free to organize these different groups of children. It recommends the need for distinct information to staff and parents. The evaluation (Skolverket, 2007a) shows that maximum fee reform has led to a more uniform regulatory system and that existing differences between municipalities are now slight.

Impact on the situation for parents

The Swedish National Agency for Education has made three questionnaire surveys (1999, 2002 and 2005) addressed to parents with children aged 1 to 12. The results from the surveys show that the proportion parents asking for some other form of care for their children other than that provided has diminished. This decrease is independent of the form of child care and the occupation of the parents (Skolverket, 2007a). Results produced by the Swedish National Agency for Education, revealed that the parents were satisfied with the form of care they received after the reform's introduction. Parents remaining at home with their children do so to a large extent as a result of their own choice and not because of other factors, such as the cost of child care or because they cannot work.

There was an expectation, especially in the case of parents in transition from unemployment to employment or from part-time occupation to full time occupation, when reduced fees in pre-school and child care for school children should lead to increased participation in the labour market. Evaluations show that fee reductions have had only minor or no effects on labour supply for parents. The most probable explanation, given by the Swedish National Agency for Education, was that the activities before the reform were already well developed and subsidised and therefore the effects were small (Skolverket, 2007a).

Impact on attendance times for children

At pre-school, family day care and leisure-time centres the average attendance for children decreased slightly between the years 1999, 2002 and 2005. The reduction in pre-school and in family day care can be explained to a great extent by the increased availability for children of unemployed parents and those on parental leave as many municipalities restrict attendance time to 15 hours per week for these groups (Skolverket, 2007a). There is not the same tendency to wards shorter time attendance for groups of children in leisure-time centres. The reduction there in attendance times is more general.

Impact on recruitment and staff

Quality aspects, for instance concerning group sizes, staff density and the educational level of staff should also be followed up according to the Government's commission to the Swedish National Agency for Education.

Average group sizes in pre-school have slightly decreased during the period and are around 17 children per group (Skolverket, 2007a). This decrease can be explained by the central grants received by the municipalities during 2005-2006 with the aim to strengthen staff density in pre-school (Skolverket, 2008a). The group size for younger children (1-3 years old) may vary between 12-16 children and in groups with older children (3-5 years old) between 15 and 22. There is also a tendency for group size to be greater in large urban areas and larger cities. The number of children per annual worker was 5.1 in 2006 and 5.2 in 2007 (Skolverket, 2008a).

In leisure-time centres the group sizes have increased. In pre-school the group sizes vary both between and within municipalities and also over time. The groups can be very large during parts of the day, mostly in the morning, as children of unemployed parents and parents on parental leave often attend pre-school then. There are some indications that at such times it becomes difficult to carry out an intended activity.

The results show that the average staff density during the reform period changed only marginally but that staff density between municipalities has decreased. The number of children per annual employee has increased at the leisure-time centres but has decreased slightly per family day minder.

There are great differences in the educational level of staff between municipalities and within municipalities in pre-school and in leisure-time centres both before and since the reform. The greatest difference is in leisure-time centres.

The follow ups provided by the Swedish National Agency for Education show that the central governmental grant for quality assurance has principally been used for staff reinforcements at pre-school (75-79 % of the total grant amount). The remaining per cent has been used for measures to increase competence at pre-school and for child care for school children. The conclusion is that the grant has been used for the intended purpose. Studies also show that municipalities have, to a great extent, invested their own funds to ensure the quality of activities in connection with the reform (Skolverket, 2007a).

The curriculum for pre-school and responsibility for adaptation

The curriculum for pre-school (Lpfö, 1998) is consistent with other curricula for the school system. The aim is that the three curricula should be associated, with a common view on knowledge, development and learning. Goals and guidelines for the pre-school curriculum are provided in the following areas:

- Norms and values
- Development and learning
- Influence of the child
- Pre-school and home
- Co-operation between pre-school class, the school and the leisure-time centre

The curriculum for Swedish pre-schools contains goals and guidelines to aim for, with the pre-school creating a pedagogical environment, based on a foundation valuing a democratic view of the child's development and learning. The curriculum states that the outcome of the individual child will not be formally assessed and evaluated. The pre-school should provide pedagogical activities which children can start and participate in, at different ages over varying periods of time. The curriculum clarifies that the activities at pre-school should be planned, implemented, assessed and developed in relation to goals set up in the curriculum. It is important that the methods of assessment are clearly related to the actual aim of the activities and that they contribute to the overall development of the pedagogical work. The concept of learning was introduced in the curriculum for pre-school (Lpfö 98, 1998) and the revised curriculum for compulsory school (Lpo 94, 1998). Pre-school should promote learning and care, upbringing and learning should form an entirety. Implementing the curriculum is a professional responsibility.

The curriculum and the impact on pedagogical practice in pre-school

The National Agency for Education (2008a) declares that the curriculum, already five years since the reform, has had a relatively important impact on pre-school. The reasons are that it encompasses the development tendency that was already in progress. Many look upon the curriculum as a document which has given a name to the activities that already existed in pre-schools. It has also contributed to increase in the status and as a support to the pedagogical work. The evaluation (Skolverket, 2004a) pointed out that the use of documentation has become more common but was often used to show parents how pre-schools work. The documentation was not, however, used amongst staff to develop activities, as emphasized in the curriculum. The National Agency for Education (Skolverket 2008a) noticed a change in using documentation and an increased awareness in the evaluation and assessment of pedagogical activities. Today pre-schools mostly use documentation of their activities as a ground for joint reflection amongst staff, known in the curriculum as pedagogical documentation. Joint reflection can be of great importance in creating opportunities to implement the curriculum. Documentation has increased and today the curriculum is commonly used as a base for work quality, competence development and evaluation of activities and formulating goals of their own, according to the curriculum. The principal of a pre-school cannot by the same degree be a pedagogical

leader since the workload has increased. The question of pedagogical responsibility has therefore been delegated to the staff to manage.

The curriculum has had a great impact in the area of Development and Learning. On the one hand there is an obvious change in the view of how children learn. Today it has become more common for there to be more focus on the individual achievements of the child, which means that such achievements are assessed from an opinion as to a child's potential achievements at different ages. It also means that less attention is paid to the preconditions the activities of a pre-school offers. The National Agency for Education (Skolverket, 2008a) regards this as something new and in contrast to earlier pre-school traditions. The tradition and foundation of Swedish pre-school has regarded development and learning as something that takes place together and in cooperation with others. On the other hand, the view of the child as curious and competent has also developed further in the spirit of tradition in Swedish pre-school, as well as the pedagogue's awareness about what children want to learn and how. The child's influence as well as more co-operation between pre-school and home and parent(s) has also developed. The curriculum has had a great impact on Norms and Value which imply care and consideration towards others, solidarity, gender equality and tolerance. This area has developed further, the reason for this being, according to the evaluation (Skolverket, 2008a) the strong tradition of such in Swedish pre-school.

An individual development plan for each child

On one hand, the use of pedagogical documentation as a tool for evaluation and assessment has increased and become more common in pre-school. The pedagogical documentation then enables the pre-school to take responsibility for its own decisions about activities. But to do so the documentation needs to be communicated, interpreted and analysed which requires time and practice for the pre-school to develop. On the other hand, for questions of quality, the common use of documentation also shows that different types of more standardised evaluation methods are increasingly used. There is a tendency for pre-schools to evaluate children's performance in relation to goals attained (Skolverket, 2008a). Mapping and evaluation of the individual child's development, based on notions of what the child can do depending on its age, has increased. The pre-school's incorporation into a goal and result oriented education system has had an impact on views concerning goal attainment in pre-school and how this can be measured and assessed. It is common that both the school and the pre-school are jointly treated in the municipality's school plans. Municipalities have formulated goals to be attained for pre-school. There seems to be no discussion about the problem that the school and the pre-school have partially different types of goals. The assessment of goal attainment is also carried out in a way that many pre-schools today formulate individual development plans for the individual child, despite the fact that no such requirement is laid down by the curriculum. The National Agency for Education (2004) already paid attention to the tendency of individual development plans and the importance of following-up such trends. It brought out a memo (Skolverket, 2006a) to clarify the fact that no such requirements are laid down by the curriculum. This ordinance only concerns children at year one in school (age 7-15) and not children in a pre-school or pre-school class. The National Agency for Education (Skolverket, 2008a) shows an increased awareness

amongst leadership and principals that pre-school has goals to attain. In spite of that, there is a tendency to govern in another direction towards individual development plans, which are assessing the child. But many principals and pedagogues are hesitant and doubtful to this, feeling they have to carry it through, as it is expected of them. On the other hand it is becoming more common that the child's motivation and interest is in focus when the activity is evaluated at pre-school. The pre-school evaluation is also used as a ground for change and development.

The individual development plans seem to be standardised to a greater extent as are models of self regulation, which is something that the child and parents have little influence over (Vallberg Roth & Månsson, 2008). The research means that development psychology has an important role here and is a contributory factor to focus on the individual child. When it is possible to outline more aspects of a child's development, then the context, pedagogical planning and the environment seem to have a tendency to be taken for granted as being natural and not as a ground for reflection (Elfström, 2005). The pedagogues have to adapt to the theoretical framework which is laid down by the curriculum with the view that the environment also becomes of importance for a child's capacity to develop and learn (Nordin Hultman, 2004).

Conclusions of the research reveal that rooms for playing and rooms for learning ought to be designed like a laboratory. The environment should also be self-instructional so that the child can have access to material without always asking for help (Björklind, 2005). It is more and more common today in Sweden that pre-schools' work is influenced by the Reggio Emilia philosophy, which has also contributed to the importance of the environment for a child's capacity for development and learning.

Integrated pedagogy or a schoolification of pre-school classes and pre-school?

There is a tendency towards schoolification in pre-school classes which show that rooms and times are organized as in the compulsory school. It also shows a focus on subject knowledge which has a tendency to be taught as something which is about doing the "right" thing or finding the "right" answer (Melander, 2006; Sahlström, 2006). Haug elucidates on this, referring to Goodson as "the normal pattern in the amalgamation of schools with different traditions is that those with highest academic status and prestige dominate" (Haug, 1992, p 96). Research also shows that the pre-school classes, where teachers from the pre-school, leisure-time centre and the primary school are working in teamwork, have difficulty exceeding the dominant discourses they are enrolled in. Their "own" discourse is taken for granted as the "right" way of understanding children, knowledge and learning (Munkhammar, 2001). The possibility of developing a joint understanding might be to communicate and reflect on common and integrated activities (Davidsson, 2002, Hjelte, 2005, Nilsson, 2005). Research results show that dialogue is important for activity development but, however, the lack of practice and the uncertainty relating to discursive conversations may end in dialogues which do not always develop fully. The dialogue is not then a real dialogue. It is more like a monologue where each person turns to and speaks to his or herself without listening to others. Each person argues for her/his own opinion instead of mutual give and take arguments (Wikgren,

2005). Pedagogical documentation can be one way of challenging this discourse (Lenz Taguchi, 2000; Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1999).

The National Agency for Education (Skolverket 2008a) shows a tendency towards preparation for schooling in pre-schools. Many municipal plans give priority to language and linguistic development in pre-schools with the intent to improve and attain goals. Such strong focus on one area of the curriculum means that the assignment to promote the view of the child's whole development will therefore be difficult to achieve. The increased monitoring and assessment of the child's development and skills is also something that The National Agency for Education interprets as preparation for schooling.

5. Lessons, implications and remaining challenges

Pre-schools are in a period of transmission encompassing both established traditions and new requirements. Concluding remarks from the evaluation by The National Agency for Education (Skolverket, 2008a) show a complex and partly contradictory picture. The *educare* model still exists and is developing, but at the same time the Swedish pre-school, in some respects, is approaching another notion of curriculum.

Pre-school has undergone far-reaching changes over the last decade. Many rules and reforms were introduced for pre-school during the Social Democratic Government. Parallel to this many municipalities carried out far-reaching decentralisation of responsibility at the local level. To determine that pre-school become the first step in the Swedish education system, responsibility for early childhood education and care was transferred to The Ministry of Education and the first curriculum for pre-school was introduced. The curriculum for pre-school and the curriculum for compulsory school are based on a shared view of knowledge, development and learning. The reason for such a transition to the educational system and introduction of the curriculum was to strengthen the pre-school's pedagogical assignment and at the same time give pre-school pedagogy more influence in school.

A further step to equalize pre-school with school was the obligation for pre-schools to make an annual quality report (the obligation was already introduced a few years earlier for schools). The guideline, defined by the Swedish National Agency for Education, states that goal achievement in pre-school shall be assessed on how it works in relation to goals set and to curriculum intention.

It should be noted that the use of documentation has become more common in pre-schools since the introduction of the curriculum. Munkhammar (2001) has shown that it is difficult for pedagogues to leave their own discursive framework and to approach new demand and collaborators. Pedagogical documentation can be a co-operative learning process for the deconstruction and reconstruction of a child's understanding, the environment and the pedagogue in relation to another (Lenz Taguchi, 1997; 2001). Pedagogical documentation therefore can function as a tool for opening up a critical and reflective practice (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1999). Haug (1992) remarked upon the

difficulty in changing the curriculum in order to alter pedagogical work and the complicated relationship between curriculum intention and pedagogical practice. The pedagogue needs to understand and have explanations for what is wrong if things not are as they are supposed to be. The pedagogue's conceptions are limited in a discursive framework which they can't exceed on their own and therefore possibilities for change are limited (Haug, 2003) Pedagogical documentation is an alternative way of evaluating and developing activities in pre-school. It might function as a tool and be in contrast to the discourse of evaluation, in which different types of more standardised evaluation methods are used. But this requires time and practice for the pre-school to develop and support both at a central and local level.

A conclusion to be drawn from this integration reform in Sweden is that Governmental decisions have to be implemented, supported and followed up on every level both in central and local areas.

The curriculum for pre-school is built on the *educare* model in which one considers the child's development as a whole and in which different aspects of development presuppose and strengthen each other. The National Agency for Education (Skolverket, 2008a) found that the pedagogues expressed an awareness of pre-school built on a long tradition of *educare*. At the same time they found an increased emphasis on children's learning after the pre-school reform. Use of diagnosis and assessment material focusing on the individual child has increased in pre-school.

Pre-schools and schools have come closer to each other at an organisational level in municipalities and in general they belong to the same board and the same administration, the Childcare and Education Committee and Departments. It has become more common for municipalities to govern pre-schools and schools with joint school plans and local municipality goals. To emphasize the character of pre-school the curriculum, in contrast to compulsory school, has no specific goals for children to achieve. The goals are formulated and directed at the activities in pre-school to aim at. It is not an individual child's results that shall be assessed or evaluated. But decentralisation with increased municipal control means that one can as a consequence see a tendency whereby municipalities make demands for the equalisation of pre-school and school, and take decisions contrary to the curriculum. Many municipalities have for example decided that pre-schools should set up individual plans for children and that they should use materials to assess children's knowledge in different areas in spite of the fact that neither the curriculum nor any other regulation demand individual plans in pre-school (Skolverket 2008a).

Historically there have always been elements of preparatory training for school in Swedish pre-school. The National Agency for Education has now remarked that there is a stronger emphasis on pre-school's role as preparation for school. The question to be raised then is in what way has it influenced pre-school? What can be seen is a schoolification in which school tradition and culture enter pre-school and pre-school classes, a tradition in which the goal of subject knowledge is to be achieved and assessed. This is something contrary to the Swedish tradition of pre-school's holistic view of the child promoting development.

There is an ongoing debate about content in pre-school. Is there a content and what does it consist of? There is a certain hesitancy over defining the content as a subject to be referred to as a school subject. A school subject has a distinct content of knowledge which has to be taught and assessed. There is hesitancy over such dominant teaching discourses emerging in Swedish pre-school.

Learning has the same status as development in the curriculum, which has been an important shift in Swedish pre-school. According to the curriculum pre-school should promote learning. Care, upbringing and learning should form an entirety. But the tendency towards schoolification might become more distinct as the new Government's ambition as of 2006 is to clarify the curriculum, especially with the aim of strengthening work with children's linguistic and mathematical development in pre-school. The Government's opinion is that pre-school has not stimulated children's natural desire to learn to its full extent. Strengthening pedagogical linguistic and mathematic work can also, according to the Ministry of Education, prepare children for school. The "new" way of narrowing the concept of learning is something to take into consideration in relation to how we understand learning and is contradictory to the curriculum. At the same time one can see a political tendency towards focusing on pre-school as a service for care. This tendency appears in the Inquiry on a new teacher education programme. Such a situation is somewhat contradictory, and so the question is which dominant learning approach will come out of these changes and how this will it have an influence on Swedish pre-school.

The political change to a new Government in 2006 came with a new political ambition, the freedom of choice. Early childhood education and care means that all children should have the right to pre-schooling during the most learning-intensive period of life. Pre-school has historically been a democratic right and played a part in balancing the differences in conditions for growing up. What democratic consequences and risks for social differences will this change of political ambition lead to?

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