NATIONAL REFORMS IN EDUCATION AND THE ROLE OF PRESCHOOL IN LIFELONG LEARNING: FINDINGS FROM SWEDEN

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Structural and organizational theory inspired the analysis. The results showed that the new school law from 2010 created a new title and new requirements of education for the preschool manager and divided responsibility between staff aiming at clarifying responsibilities. Preschool is now declared as a separate school form with a separate curriculum. The results from the interviews with preschool managers showed that they appreciated the separate school form, their new title and clarifying of responsibility among staff. They also reported consequence of the reform such as outplace of some preschool managers (with inadequate education), intensified recruitment of staff with suitable education, reorganizing staff and initial renegotiate about responsibilities among the staff members. Based upon earlier studies and the results from the data collection a structural model, top down, were constructed. The aim of the model is to suggest areas and issues that could be of significant value concerning preschool as a first step in lifelong learning. Whether and how support for learning in early childhood is also implemented during daily activities is an issue for further research.

Keywords: Lifelong learning, National reforms, Early childhood education, Preschool managers.

Introduction

When lifelong learning is mentioned today the concept and the perspective seems to have been accepted (European Commission, 2010a, 2010b). The rapid changes in society concerning knowledge and the question of supporting creativity also concerns early childhood and those professions working with children in younger ages. As Finsterwald et al. (2012) argues, teachers need systematic support in their own lifelong learning as well as they should be prepared to promote lifelong learning competences among children and pupils.

In a broad sense the role of preschool in Lifelong Learning could lead to several research questions, they can vary and concern didactic as well as hierarchy in education system. The significance of the topic could be regarded as a question of allocation of resources if preschool learning – supported by professional preschool teachers - is shown to be an important part in a learning biography for children, later on attractive persons in a labor force.

Earlier studies show that in European countries, preschool could either be compulsory at a certain age of the child, or an option. Further on studies show that learning in preschool can both possible enrich children´s development and have an impact on later studies. The important role of preschool seems to be unchallenged. This role can anyway be supported or challenged when national reforms in the education system are implemented.
The aim of this article is to study in what way new national reforms support or challenge the role preschool has in the education system, in this case Sweden. The research perspective is mainly a structural and organizational perspective. The first research question concerns changes that were implemented in preschool mostly on an organizational level. How are the changes for preschool presented in the new school law and the curriculum for the preschool? The second research question concerns how the managers in the preschools perceived the changes in the steering documents. Which changes are perceived? How are they handled?

The article continues with a literature review. Then follows a presentation of the methodology and the results are analyzed and discussed. A part of the discussion suggests areas and issues that could be of significant value concerning preschool as a first step in lifelong learning. The article ends with a conclusion.

**Earlier Studies**

The presentation below of earlier studies will show that the question of lifelong learning has resulted in studies with different themes. One theme is lifelong learning and the education system. Questions can be asked about whether preschool is compulsory, if preschool is separate or integrated in the education system. Another theme concern the professionals, what kind of (formal) skills and, or education is needed for work in preschool and if the managers are expected to have a leadership education. These questions also concerns how Higher Education is responding to these demands, such as offering Initial Teacher Programs for preschool teachers. Lastly a question is whether there are attitudes and skills related to lifelong learning that staff at preschool has to both have themselves and support the children to achieve, a didactic question.

Preschool today, is part of education in most educational system, or in social welfare. The care/education has got different names depending upon their profile, such as child care centers, kindergarten, nursery school, preschool. Most often the activities are financed from Department of Education or Department of Social Welfare – or equivalent depending upon the governance system in respective countries. In some countries the activities are privately funded and organized. There are also differences whether there is a law supporting preschool or an accreditation system for organizing preschools (Spodek and Saracho, 2005a).

In some countries there are two levels for preschool, those for birth to 2 years old, and those for 3-5 years old, such as in Portugal (Vasconcelos, 2005). Increasingly the activities are supposed to have a learning component, especially for children between 3-5 years of age. In some countries a 6 year old is already in compulsory school, such as in Norway, Australia, Korea, China and Portugal (Lillemyr, 2005; Schiller, Veale and Harper, 2005; Zhu and Wang, 2005; Rhee, Rhee and Lee, 2005; Vasconcelos, 2005), or in preschool class, as in Finland (Ojala, 2005).

The prime aim of Early Childhood Education has long been caretaking to let parents become a part of the workforce as well as support for development of the children. Especially women’s possibility, or need, to work has influenced the extension of preschool (Lillemyr, 2005). But the caretaking has more and more been influenced by an expectation that the staff should support the children’s learning. There is still a need to clarify the relationship between care and education, and a combination of both, called educare, is sometimes what is actually practiced (Spodek and Saracho, 2005b). According to Sheridan et al. (2011) it is such a dual approach with a combination of care and education, educare, which is embodied in the Swedish preschool curriculum. The use of the term preschool, before school, can in itself show the connection to education and schooling. The development of a preschool class for 6 year old children could be perceived as a close relation to schooling. The trend is that preschool is a part of the public education system and one underlying aim of the preschool curriculum is lifelong learning according to Pramling Samuelsson (2006). This trend, with schooling is also what Wagner predicted would slightly increase in Sweden (2006), which eventually also happened.
The question of care and education is also a question of the knowledge and skills the staff at preschools should have. As lifelong learning is a perspective and skills that both teachers and children are supposed to develop a definition of lifelong learning could be useful. The Commission of the European Communities (2000) defines lifelong learning as “all purposeful learning activity, undertaken on an ongoing basis with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competence” (ibid p. 3). The definition could be perceived as a diffuse goal and therefore researchers have developed it. Finsterwald et al. (2012) worked with what they call core determinants of lifelong learning such as enduring motivation and appreciation for education and learning, competence for self-regulated learning and social competence for cooperative learning and cognitive competences such as critical and creative thinking. Finsterwald et al. developed a program for developing the core determinants and found that the program did not only promote individual skills, it could also promote school development in general. These core determinants can also be developed in preschool as shown by Perels et al. (2009). In this case Perels et al. used a process model of self-regulation with pre-action phase, action phase and post-action phase. During the program preschool teachers discussed and practiced giving support to children’s lifelong learning. After training preschool teachers in fostering self-regulation in children in preschool they could show that the selected preschool teachers and preschool children improved their self-regulated learning.

Sheridan, Williams, Sandberg and Vuorinen (2011) have studied how preschool teachers give meaning to teacher competence. In the analysis of the results Sheridan et al. found three intertwined dimensions of teacher competences which in turn constitute the meaning given to competence by the preschool teachers. The dimensions are competence of knowing what and why, competence of know-how and interactive, relational and transactional competence. Sheridan et al. also discuss self-education and that a will to change is important for the teachers. The teachers wanted take part in lifelong learning which Sheridan et al. interpreted as part of one dimensions in teacher competence: knowing what and why. The core determinants are also discussed by Sheridan et al. in a third dimension of teacher competence: interactive, relational and transactional competences. The teachers discussed collaboration in working team and found it a necessary skill.

The findings of Sheridan et al. concerning self-education and collaboration could be compared with some of the core determinants Finsterwald et al. (2012) used. They seem to have a common idea about certain important dimensions: appreciation for education and learning, competence for self-regulated learning and social competence for cooperative learning.

The findings also concerned a will to change. Teachers in Early childhood education will experience changes and one of the skills they have to have is flexibility, to be able to adapt to changes in local, national and global conditions (Spodek and Saracho, 2005b).

Initial Teacher Education, ITE, for Early Childhood Education, such as preschool has developed in accordance with how preschool activities have developed. In some countries ITE is still in initial progress and has not reached academic level such as in Turkey (Bekman, 2005), in other countries such as Finland more and more students are choosing to add education and get a Master with a preschool profile (Ojala, 2005). Depending on the age of the children and the organization of care and education there could also be several educations, such as in Korea where there is a shorter education for teachers in Child-Care Centers than for teachers in Kindergarten (Rhee, Rhee and Lee, 2005). Before the most recent Teacher Education reform in Sweden, 2011, there was no separate teacher program for preschool teachers; their education was integrated together with leisure time instructors and teachers for primary. This integration has also led to a more academic Teacher Education, not taking into account the unique experience from preschool (Johansson, 2006).

Research on Early Childhood Education follows depending on how Early Childhood education and ITE are constructed. The interest has been in childhood development and often based on theories of psychology of maturation. In these theories it is often argues that children are not mature for education until they are 7 years old, and as a consequence there should be no education in early childhood. The theory of maturation has been challenged and today the theory of importance of learning environment also in early childhood is most in front such as language development, arts, the role of play and subjects or themes and special needs. These theories of the individual has been paralleled by theories of groups
such as political ideology of social justice, based in theories of sociology (Spodek and Sassaro, 2005a; Ojala, 2005; Shirakawa and Kitano, 2005; Rhee, Rhee and Lee, 2005).

Other research interests have concerned comparisons between children participating and not participating in preschool, parent’s role, the transition between education levels, such as between preschool and compulsory school and later on the use of communication technology, ICT (Ojala, 2005).

There is also an increased interest in quality issues (Rhee, Rhee and Lee, 2005) and some of the used scales are Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale, ECERS, by Harms & Clifford, or Leuven Involvement Scale for Young Children, LIS-YC, from Laevers (referred in Ojala, 2005). According to Sheridan et al. (2011) one aspect of quality is that teachers themselves should be engaged in learning as a process of lifelong learning. Rönnerman (2000) suggests that action research contain elements which support self-engagement in learning.

A shift to interest in learning environment can be the reason that countries today have a national curriculum for preschools, or at least a policy. Curricula can be found in many countries, but are not always mandatory as in Australia (Schiller, Veale and Harper, 2005). In 1998, preschool in Sweden got a curriculum. Thereby it also became considered as a first stage in the educational system (Sheridan et al. 2011).

**Context for Preschool in Sweden**

Autumn 2011 about 470 000 children in ages 1-5 participated in preschool, which is more than 83 percent of all children in those ages. The reason why children in age 6 are not included is that they are offered a preschool class. All preschool activities and the preschool class are voluntarily. Children start compulsory school at age 7. Preschool is offered to all children from age 1 if their parents work or study. It is also offered if the parents are unemployed or on parental leave, in this case the child could participate during about 3 hours per day (Skolverket 2012a, b). The parents pay a fee, but most of the cost is financed by income tax.

The municipality is organizing preschool, but there are also private organizers. There are 7 339 public preschools and 2 694 private preschools. If a municipality is accepting a private organizer, after checking certain criteria, the private organizer gets payment depending upon how many children are participating. The municipality is controlling that preschool sustain good quality and security for both public and private preschools. The National School Inspectorate is controlling that the municipalities are taking their responsibility concerning control of preschools (Skolverket 2012c, Skolinspektionen 2011).

Work in preschool is organized in work teams. A work team often consists of preschool teachers and child care takers. Other occupations could also be present, such as assistants. The preschool manager is responsible for the activities and is the leader for one or several work teams.

There is an Initial Teacher Program for becoming a preschool teacher, which was recently reformed (2011). One change is that the Preschool teacher program is now a separate program. They also choose age level to teach from the start. Earlier student teachers were applying to a Teacher program and they could choose profile and ages to teach during the studies. With this organization they choose profile and ages to teach from the start. the program is on academic level and last three and a half years (SFS 1993:100).

**Method for Data Collection**

During 2010-2012 an official evaluation of the support from The National Agency of Education to local implementation of school law and revised curriculum for preschool was carried out by the author of this paper (Niklasson, 2012). The evaluation included the aim of later use of data for further research. Thereby the research questions in this article are not the exactly the same as the questions in the evaluation report.
There are some prerequisites, or say assumptions, included in this article concerning Early Childhood education. First of all, based on earlier research, there is an assumption that preschool is already a part of Lifelong learning. Secondly, there is an assumption that national reforms have the possibility to either strengthen or weaken parts of the education system. In addition, the local organizations can either support or resist changes in the education system. As the context is complicated a design with experiment or test of clear causality using quantitative method is not used. Instead the research design is exploratory and includes studies of documents and perceptions of professionals (managers) working in and responsible for preschool.

The aim here is to study in what way a national reform can support the role preschool has in the education system, in this case Sweden. The research perspective is mainly a structural and organizational perspective.

The first research question concerns the changes that were implemented in preschool mostly on an organizational level. What are the changes for preschool presented in the new school law and the curriculum for the preschool? The documents used are the school law (SFS 2010:80) and the revised curriculum for preschool (SKOLFS 1998:16/2011:69). The second research question concerns how the managers in the preschools perceive the changes in the steering documents. How can these changes be related to lifelong learning?

Concepts like (education) system and (professional) roles indicate that the analysis is inspired by structural theory, where meaning and significance lies in system of relations. By reading documents there is a possibility to understand how policy makers “understand” preschool in the education system, and by interviewing the preschool managers there is a study how they “understand” their new framework. The closest the study comes to deductive design is that the structural perspective is used to describe relations in the analysis and discussion. The study is rather based on the data collection, an inductive design, where a hypothesis is suggested (Hughes, 2010. In this case a model is constructed as a suggestion for further discussion in the Analysis and discussion section.

Both the selection of official documents and of persons for interviews is an example of purposive sampling (Hayes, 2010). The official documents are two of the legal documents governing preschool (school law and preschool curriculum). The analysis of the documents aims at giving a description of the changes in the preschool.

The choice of managers was originally based on contrasts and responsible organizers. One of the municipalities had a low attendance on conferences arranged by the National Agency of Education, it was rural and with few in the population. The other had a high attendance on conferences arranged by the National Agency of Education, it was urban and with large population. Both also had private organizers of preschool. The purpose in this study with the interviews is to study perceptions of managers in preschool; there is no division between for example preschool managers working in public and private preschool, all are included in one population.

Before the interviews all managers got a letter with information about the study, also clarifying that the data collection was part of an evaluation but also part of research. This information was given both to the public and the private organizers. There was an immediate access to the public preschool managers and most of the private ones. There were 84 managers in the possible population. The access was there but not the total entry (Ball referred to in Vasconcelos, 2010), as 73 of them agreed to participate. 47 participated in group interviews in place (either their own workplace or a municipality office), 4 participated in individual interview in place, 13 participated in individual interview by telephone and 9 wrote answers in e-mail. The 13 individual interviews by telephone were carried out by a research assistant, all others by the author of this article. Both public and private organizers are represented. All interviews were recorded and then transcribed. All interviews were carried out in Swedish and any quotation in this paper is translated to English by the author.

The questions that are of certain interest in this study concerned how preschool activities were organized and any recent reorganization. Further on any changes in relations between staff members. Lastly how new school law and revised curriculum have affected work at preschool. Other questions were considered if they in any way gave information about the earlier mentioned questions.
The answers where then used for content analysis; that is, the analysis is data driven and qualitative. Some of the questions from the earlier evaluation became key questions, such as questions concerning organization and staff relations from the earlier evaluation report (Niklasson, 2012). The original transcripts from the interview were also re read. During the double re reading it became possible to construct certain themes which became headlines for presentations of the preschool manager’s perceptions.

There is no possibility to argue that the study can be replicated as in a positivist framework. Therefore there is uncertainty. Rather, it is possible that the analysis of the documents and the analysis of the interviews could have led other results using for example gender theory. The validity of the findings do not add to an argument for generalization, although as the presentation of earlier studies showed, there are some issues concerning preschool that seems to be general (Edwards, 2010, Hughes, 2010; Hayes, 2010).

Changes for Preschool Presented in Steering Documents

In Sweden, there are national directives for preschool such as school law and curriculum for preschool. These directives changed during a reform 2010 and 2011 including a new school law and a revised curriculum for preschool. Preschool became a school form of its own and got a separate curriculum. Although a separate curriculum there is a common value ground in all curricula for the education system comprising preschool, compulsory school and non-compulsory upper secondary. Both public and private organizer have to follow the curriculum, earlier private organizers did not have to do that. All preschools should have a preschool manager, as there are responsibilities for preschool teachers; the preschool has to be sure to employ preschool teachers. At least once a year parents shall be informed about the child’s development, a preschool teacher is responsible for this dialogue. The preschool manager’s responsibility for systematic quality work was underlined (SFS 2010:800).

The revision of the preschool curricula comprised a stronger writing concerning the pedagogic work. There are no goals for the children, but goals for the preschool activities. The preschool teacher has a responsibility to evaluate how the goals are reached concerning the children’s language and mathematic development and science and technique. The concepts education and teaching are now used in preschool. This is especially important as some private organizers have a religious profile. The teaching should be non-confessional, but the education (as the activity in preschool is not called) could be confessional. The preschool manager is responsible for the education and the preschool teacher is responsible for the teaching in preschool (SFS 2010:800, SKOLFS 1998:16/2011:69).

Preschool Manager’s Perception of Changes in Directives

As the preschool managers did not get a direct question concerning the role of preschool in lifelong learning the presentation is an interpretation and analysis of answers of other questions. During the re reading it was possible to sort out themes.

Lifelong Learning One of the Reasons for Reform

All preschool managers are aware of the reforms concerning preschool. They have studied the school law and the revised curriculum. They have also participated in several meetings and further education concerning the reforms. We talked about the reforms in general and also why the reforms were carried out. The reasons that were mentioned were a need of higher quality in preschool, that the status of preschool and preschool teacher should be raised, that preschool should shift focus from caretaking to learning, that it should be more clear that preschool is a part of lifelong learning and lastly that Sweden, in general, is getting a worse position compared with other countries in Europe. These were the reasons the
preschool managers perceived from a national authority standpoint, most of them found the reasons acceptable, except for the last one, completion in Europe that was not strongly supported.

Re Organization Strengthen Preschool

Some of the preschool managers had got a new title. This was especially common among the preschool managers in private preschools. Many work teams had been re organized to secure that there should be at least one preschool teacher. This was not always possible to organize; it could happen that a preschool teacher had to be mobile between work teams. Both re organization and the new title were perceived to strengthen preschool activities and position for preschool manager and preschool teacher.

Individual and Collective Self-Studies

The reform had led to a renewed interest for the curricula in preschool according to the preschool managers. The curriculum became more in focus and the activities were connected to the goals for preschool to a higher degree. This also meant that the staff had to organize individual and collective self-studies concerning the curricula and other related documents. The organizers of preschool had invited lecturers to present and talk about the steering documents, the National Agency for Education had offered conferences about the reform and some universities have offered further education.

The preschool managers argued that these studies had also included interpretation and critical discussions within the work teams. The steering documents are not always clear and the staff first of all had to understand the document and then relate the document to the local preschool. The preschool managers argued that there was a positive attitude to changes among the staff. What can happen is that the staff is more concerned with “doing” and testing, than having several discussion for example about concepts before action.

New Concepts: Education and Teaching

Activities in preschool in Sweden have slowly progressed into a balance between caretaking and education, so called educare. Within the reform it is clarified that the term daycare center (“dagis”) should not be used, the children are participating in preschool. The preschool managers have noticed this change and many have already used preschool instead of daycare center. But they comment that they are aware of that “dagis” is still used, sometimes among parents and children themselves.

This change could be connected to two other words that should be used in preschool: education and teaching. The activity in preschool is now called education, not caretaking. This does not exclude that the children are taken care of, but that should not be the prime focus. There is a shift to use words that have a connotation to school. The preschool managers have noted that some in the work teams are not in favor of the change. They prefer to talk more about caretaking and children’s play. Other argues that the caretaking is still there and that play is a part of the learning environment.

The preschool managers tell that some members of staff dislike the words and find them uncomfortable and frightening. Education can be perceived as a difficult concept, a concept that cannot be combined with preschool. In the preschool the children should be taken care of, feel safe and be happy. Some members of the staff remember their own schooling and do not want to have a situation where the children should sit on a chair and be quiet and listen to a teacher. At the same time, the preschool managers tell about other members of the staff that argue that education and teaching is already at hand at preschool. The children learn and are thought all day round, they learn by each other and by adults. The way of handling this situation for the preschool managers is that they will continue to discuss the concepts as it is important to use the correct concepts in dialogue with each other, with parents and when the staff describes the activities.

When using word like education and teaching the learning environment become more in focus. In addition, when it is clarified that it is the preschool teacher (with an academic pedagogic education) that
are responsible for teaching the preschool managers perceive that the importance of the learning environment is even stronger.

The concepts education and teaching have been discussed and one challenge is the difference between them according to the preschool managers. When is it education and when is it teaching? Are the child caretakers allowed to teach? What is teaching? Many of the discussions, according to the preschool managers, have ended in perceiving education as an overarching concept and teaching as a part of it, but the difference is not totally clear.

**Learning Environment**

Earlier the work team had a very independent position and could organize their activities, not always relating to the curriculum. Today the activities should, to a higher degree, be related to the curriculum. It is the preschool teacher that is responsible for the teaching. Regarding the responsibility for the learning environment this area is where the responsibility between the preschool teacher and the preschool manager could be unclear; the issue is which of them that should be the driving force. The preschool manager is the pedagogic leader, but the preschool teacher should teach.

One example can illustrate how discussions are carried out concerning what a learning environment could be. The children in preschool should have an influence on the activities in preschool. The issue of children’s influence has led to critical comments in some work teams. The work by the staff in work teams in preschool is often appreciated by children and the parents and the question is why they should change their well-planned routine. The preschool managers commented that some work teams have agreed on a flow of activities in relation to a time-schedule. This could be an effect of that it is easier to agree on a time-schedule that be flexible with start and ending an activity. Other work teams have changed and are observing the children and based on the observations they suggest changes of activities, except from lunchtime which is established.

The preschool managers mainly discussed children’s influence from a power perspective, who shall decide. It was less common to discuss it form a learning perspective, the issue of learning and acting democracy. But this aspect did occur, during the interviews.

The reorganization clarified that responsibility is divided between staff in preschool. This has led to discussion concerning the difference between being responsible and to carry out. The immediate difference concerned that the preschool teacher is not responsible for the development dialogue concerning each child with their parents. This was not appreciated by all child takers that earlier carried out the dialogue. After some time the change was interpreted as a responsibility to for example be sure that the dialogue was scheduled and the agenda during the dialogue. The preschool teacher does not have to carry out all dialogues with children and parents. On the other hand, if a child care take do not want to carry out the dialogue, the preschool teacher has to do it.

**Special Needs**

Before the reform, a preschool manager was responsible for giving a child with special needs for development support, but with the new school law this responsibility is clarified. In general, staff has a challenge in both supporting individual needs and group needs. They should support an individual child, but at the same time create a learning environment which is supporting all children. When a child needs special support the staff in the work team has to both argue for extra support and give a suggestion how the learning environment could be changes to give the extra support. With this document as a background the preschool manger decides about taking measures. The discussions among the staff concern how the documentation of the child’s needs and the suggestions for changes in the learning environment should be created. In compulsory school an individual child can get a so called measurement document and thereby extra support. In preschool the focus should be less on the individual, more on the learning environment. This creates a dilemma for the staff.
Quality Issues

The question of who is the driving force – preschool manager or preschool teacher - occurs also concerning responsibility for quality. The preschool manager has the responsibility for quality and that systematic quality assurance is carried out, but the preschool teacher should carry out the teaching and the quality assurance. The preschool managers supported the preschool teachers to carry out this and instead of asking the work team they could now ask the preschool teacher about these questions.

The systematic quality work is, among other things, based upon how pedagogic documentation is carried out. The preschool managers repeatedly raised the question of how challenging it is to document on an individual basis, a group of children basis and also document on an activity basis. In our dialogue they took up questions which of the three foci should be emphasized, what should be documented, how documentation is carried out and, not the least, where should the documentation be presented. Concerning the question “how”, a discussion occurred concerning that preschool staff sometimes describe a process or an activity. These descriptions are ok, that is not the problem. The problem, which also the National School Inspection has pointed out according to the preschool managers, is that there is a lack of analysis of result. The preschool managers agree that there can be a lack of analysis; they want to have further discussions about follow up, evaluation and development.

Another issue which the preschool managers bring up is that the activities in preschool should be based on scientific base and experience according to the school law. The word experience seems not to be a problem, at first sight. It is the world scientific base which creates a challenge. First of all the word have to be discussed and understood in the work teams. The next step is to look for this “scientific base”, where is it possible to find? The work teams have to be engaged in further studies, basically on their own.

Consequences of the Clarified Learning Assignment for Children and Parents

What will the children and the parent’s notice of the changes? The preschool managers gave some examples. Some work teams are changing their behavior, they are more together with the children, they listen and they observe. Maybe there are not additional occasions for play, but they let the play go on for a longer time of period. Instead there is increased “pedagogic thinking”. Some parents have noticed that their children are not active with producing “small things” which they bring home. Learning takes some time and there is no fast “production”. The children are also more engaged in planning and pedagogic documentation.

As an example of pedagogic documentation pictures taken of activities are presented on the walls in the hall of the preschool. Children can also have individual portfolios. More and more often the work teams present their activities by choosing a theme and relate the theme to goals in the curriculum. By this design of the presentation the parents get a quick overview of the work and are also reminded of the framework, that is the national curriculum.

Analysis and Discussion of Results

The result from the study of documents showed that the new school law from 2010 strengthened the leadership in preschool by creating a new title for the manager (who should be a pre schoolteacher or equivalent) and divided responsibility between staff aiming at clarifying responsibilities. Earlier preschool and compulsory school was included in the same ‘school form’, now it is a separate school form with separate curriculum. The intention with the rewritten curriculum for preschool from 2011 is clear; work in preschool, has to focus on knowledge.

The results from the interviews with the preschool managers showed that they appreciated the separate school form, the separate curriculum and the new title. They perceived that the role of the preschool was strengthened. By clarifying responsibility, both the role of the preschool manager and the
The learning environment in preschool was commented on in several ways. The reform had resulted in individual and collective self-studies among the staff as they had to reread the revised curriculum and discuss it. Concepts like education and teaching were discussed and what happens with caretaking. Issues like children’s influence on activities could also be regarded as a question of learning, not only about power relations. The staff always has to have several perspectives, the individual, and the group and activity level. This is challenged when children needs special supports for development, as staff has to formulate an application for support and at the same time formulate how the learning environment should be changed to meet the needs. The staff is mostly perceived as interested in changes but there is a problem with following up and critically discussing and analyzing results. In addition to this there is a need for development on how to think regarding that the activities should be based upon scientific results and reflected experience.

Based upon the earlier studies and the data collection it is possible to construct different models which can be used to critically discuss whether preschool is part of lifelong learning. The models in figure 1-3 are constructed from national, local perspective and organizational perspective.

These three figures could be combined into a hypothesis: the more preschool fit in to each of the models, the more preschool can contribute to lifelong learning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National level, authority</th>
<th>Law</th>
<th>Education system</th>
<th>Curriculum</th>
<th>Teacher education</th>
<th>Further education</th>
<th>Leadership</th>
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<tr>
<td>Ministry of Education</td>
<td>Regulated in law</td>
<td>Separated or integrated in education system</td>
<td>National curriculum</td>
<td>Mandatory Teacher education for preschool teachers</td>
<td>Further education is provided Leadership training for preschool managers</td>
<td>Academic level</td>
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**Figure 1.** National level support for preschool as part of lifelong learning.

There is a difference in framework for preschools depending upon how society is constructed (Sheridan et al, 2011, Spodek and Saracho, 2005a). As I suggest in figure 1 there are certain factors that can support preschool as part of lifelong learning on a national level. In Sweden preschool gets directives from the government via Ministry of Education and research. Preschool is integrated in the education system. The organization and activities are regulated in a school law and in a national curriculum. This curriculum is mandatory to follow irrespective whether the organizer is public or private. Preschool teachers are educated at academic level during Initial preschool education program. There is also an academic level leadership education for preschool managers, but this is not mandatory to participate in to get a leadership assignment.

Even though preschool in lifelong learning could be supported from national level, the local level is an important contributor. As noted in earlier studies preschool is not always compulsory, the age groups vary and the education for preschool teachers vary; lastly financing varies (Bekman 2005, Lillemyr, 2005, Ojala, 2005, Rhee, Rhee and Lee, 2005, Vasconcelos, 2005, Schiller, Veale and Harper, 2005, Zhu and Wang, 2005).
On local level, in Sweden, preschool gets directive from the Education committee (political actors) and the administrators. Most of the financing is received from taxes to the local level. The majority of children ages 1-5 participate. Each unit has a preschool manager; the preschool manager is offered a leadership training (although not mandatory). Mainly preschool teachers are recruited, the preschool teachers have an academic teacher exam and further education is provided.

It is of course, depending on the society structure, possible to have an organizational level as a starting point. How curriculum is constructed, the balance between education and care and dimensions of lifelong learning including action research can be perceived to be important dimensions (Finsterwald et al. 2012, Perels et al. 2009, Rönnerman, 2000, Sheridan et al., 2011). The aspects of lifelong learning are meant to be grounded in the preschool teachers competence, a competence that is later on used to support the children’s own competence concerning lifelong learning.

The newly revised curriculum for preschool in Sweden is learning oriented. Whether the staff is engaged in individual and collective lifelong learning for themselves and the children is an empirical question. In this case I use the comments from the preschool managers as to interpret what dimensions of

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1 A definition of unit for this article: a unit could consists of one or several preschools.
lifelong learning the staff is engaged in. According to the preschool managers most of the staff is positive to change. They do have a problem with finding relevant scientific research and experience they refer to has not always been thoroughly reflected. On the other hand they are motivated and appreciate education and learning. The competence for self-regulated learning and social cooperative learning seem to be there but needs to be developed. The same goes for the cognitive competences.

The model based upon the three figures should of course be critically discussed an elaborated. Depending on the construction of society some levels and parts could be more or less important.

Conclusion

The conclusion is that a recent reform in Sweden has tried to support the role of preschool in the education system. The support included separation of preschool as a school form, a separate curriculum, clarifying of professional roles among staff and an emphasize on learning for the children. Whether the reforms have supported individual or collective lifelong learning skills is an empirical question need to be further studied. The reform is perceived positively among preschool managers (in this study) although they also notice that there are challenges such as roles among staff and higher demands the learning environment and development of quality. Based on earlier studies and the finding from interviews with preschool managers it was possible to construct a model on three levels which could be starting point for critical discussion of the strength of support to lifelong learning.

References


