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Like school and not like school: ambivalences in Swedish preschool teachers' enacted policy

Johan Liljestrand 

Faculty of Education and Business Studies, Department of Educational Sciences, Educational Science, University of Gävle

ABSTRACT

There is a tension in Swedish preschool policy when it comes to a subject curriculum and a child-centred curriculum. This article examines how Swedish preschool teachers have dealt with this relationship by focusing on the purpose of the preschool and how preschool teachers become part of the enacted preschool policy. The purpose of the study is to investigate Swedish preschool teachers' policy talk pertaining to the preschool's assignment to depart from children's own interests and school-like subjects. The analysis of interviews with 10 preschool teachers shows how local policy talk is positioned in favour of a child-centred discourse, how tensions can gradually appear in the same sequence and how different actualizations in the national curriculum change the interviewees' messages. The interviews highlight how enacted preschool policy appears as multi-layered and messy, thereby actualizing a discussion about the basic purpose of the Swedish preschool and its relation to school.

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Introduction

In her dissertation on Swedish preschool policy, Folke-Fichtelius (2008) points out that the Swedish preschool is 'tied to the issue of the relationship between freedom and control, which is one of the most fundamental questions of early childhood education. This, in turn, is tied to the question of the boundary between preschool and school' (p. 290). The relationship between preschool and school policy has been a vibrant issue in several countries (e.g. Miller et al., 2017), which is hardly surprising considering that the preschool precedes school. This also means that we need to address this relationship in order to understand the shaping of preschool policy. Furthermore, national school systems are shaped differently and have consequences for how preschool policy is characterized.

This article examines how Swedish preschool teachers have dealt with this relationship. The focus is on the purpose of the preschool and particularly how preschool teachers become part of enacted preschool policy. Kaga (2017) points out that although several studies have focused on the implementation of preschool policy and its link to primary education, few have paid attention to the purpose of the reform. In her comparative study, Kaga (2017) shows that despite adaptations to the school system Swedish preschool policy has treated the preschool as unique; something that can in turn be interpreted as

a hybridized discourse consisting of pre-existing layers (Popkewitz & Lindblad, 2000). This could be understood as a consequence of ECE policy being initiated globally for supporting school success, as well as from the Swedish tradition of defining the preschool as different from school (cf. Miller et al. 2017). A central component in the relationship between the school and preschool in Sweden is whether the child and child-initiated play should be the points of departure for the educational activities, rather than a predefined subject content. Earlier studies of science in the Swedish preschool have shown that there is a lack of clarity amongst preschool teachers about what their mission is (Sundberg et al. 2016; Due et al., 2018).

Based on interviews and policy documents, this article explores preschool policy as an enacted national policy (Maguire et al., 2015; cf. Lago et al., 2018) that preschool teachers are expected to respond to in their teaching practices (Miller et al. 2018). Ball et al. (2012) describe these policy enactments as neither top-down nor bottom-up, but as 'a dynamic and non-linear aspect of the whole complex that makes up the policy process of which policy in [pre-] school is just one part' (p. 6, author's added prefix). Thus, professionals' policy talk *in* the preschool is approached as part of the re-contextualized preschool policy, rather than separated from national policy.

Against this background, the purpose of the study is to investigate Swedish preschool teachers' policy talk pertaining to the preschool's assignment to depart from children's own interests and school-like subjects. The material, which consists of policy documents and interviews on national policy, is analysed as policy enactments. The national curriculum that is referred to is the earlier version from 1998 and then revised in 2010 because the interviews were conducted in 2017. In the analysis of the national curriculum, below, the differences and similarities between the earlier version and the revised version are clarified. I also highlight the tension between the focus on the child and the subject in the national curriculum. The results from this study will therefore also have relevance for the curriculum that was further revised in 2018. The article begins with a section on the research background, which is followed by a presentation of the Swedish national policy documents. The study's design and data are then presented and followed by an analysis of the preschool teachers' policy talk. The final section sums up and relates the findings to international preschool policy.

Research background

From being mainly shaped by a child-centred curricula policy, the Swedish preschool has successively adapted its goals in order to prepare pupils for the school system (Åsén et al., 2012). This is also recorded in studies of Swedish preschool teachers and the increased emphasis on learning as a basic activity in their work (e.g. Alatalo et al., 2016; Alvestad & Berge, 2009; Löfdahl & Pérez, 2009). Research has shed light on the possibilities for and limitations of providing space for children to learn that does not take traditional subject knowledge for granted (e.g. Areljung et al., 2017; Areljung & Kelly-Ware, 2017). Otterstad and Braathe (2016) go even further and claim that the Nordic social pedagogic tradition, i.e. focusing on child-initiated learning rooted in here-and-now-situations, is threatened by a neo-liberal discourse based on preparations for school and the assessment of each individual child. In their focus group study, they also find support for how Norwegian preschool teachers resist this discourse.

Swedish preschool teachers' attempts to include children's interests and at the same time pay attention to the national goals have been studied by Thörner (2016), who has mainly focused on and recorded everyday situations. She has found that preschool teachers guide children in two basic ways: capturing their interest by taking their activities as a starting point and by modifying their interests. However, there are also situations in which the children's interests have not been considered. Alnervik (2013) has

analysed how contradictions in the preschool's activity system (cf. Sundberg et al. 2016) have generated new practices. In her focus group study of Swedish preschool teachers, Granbom (2011) discerned a basic pattern in which the relationship between freedom and government was actualized.

Sundberg et al. (2016) problematized the relationship between a child-centred curriculum and a subject focus. According to their findings, ECE science education activities are often interrupted 'due to the teachers' efforts to always be responsive to the children's new and spontaneous interests and views' (p. 577). They further suggest that 'this dilemma partly arises from the somewhat conflicting messages in the revised curriculum' (ibid.). The collusion between the autonomy of the children, on the one hand, and implementing goals for science teaching on the other is also visible in interviews (Due et al., 2018). Similar tensions in teachers' depictions of preschool class activities have also been labelled as switching between educational positioning in different curricular expectations (Ackesjö & Persson, 2016). Earlier research on teachers in the comprehensive school has also noted such ambivalence in teachers' approaches to student centeredness and subject foci. The policy context behind such an approach amongst Swedish preschool teachers is described in more detail in the next section.

Two layers of (national) policy expectations

A large number of projects linking the preschool and school started in the 1970 s and resulted in a pedagogical programme in 1987. Up to 1998, the Swedish preschool was governed by the National Board of Health and Welfare, after which governance was transferred to the Swedish National Agency for Education. Since 2010, subjects like mathematics, science and the Swedish language have been added to the national curriculum. The reason for this was stated by the former Minister for Education, Jan Björklund, as contributing to stronger results in school. This reform was also initiated at a time when the minister expressed concerns about Sweden's poor achievements in international PISA tests. By including these goals, the Swedish preschool now shares some general goals with the preschool class in the nine-year compulsory school, which provides a link to Swedish primary education.

In Sweden, the policy has always been based on the preschool as a unique form of school applying a holistic pedagogy (Kaga 2017), i.e. a pedagogy that interconnects subject knowledge with the children's own interests and daily care. The preschool's goals are defined as 'goals to strive for', rather than as goals to be fulfilled, due to the fact that preschool attendance is voluntary and has the interests of the

children as a central aim. From an international perspective, Kaga (2017) characterizes Swedish policy as not putting any pressure on children of preschool age. In what follows, the updated 1998 curriculum is analysed, which was in place at the time of the interviews. I also show how the tension between the child and the subject is basically the same in the new curriculum of 2018.

In 2010 the concept of ‘teaching’ was included in the national curriculum, thereby implying challenges for the preschool as a unique form of education. For example, the intention to base teaching on the previous curriculum relating to children’s activities was raised in a lecture given by the Swedish Schools Inspectorate.¹ The relationship between child- and teacher-centred formulations appears as differences in pedagogical agency, i.e. which is positioned as actively framing the pedagogical situation. These can be linked to Deng and Luke (2008) analytical distinction between disciplinary knowledge based on canonical academic knowledge (cf. Bennet, 2005) and experiential knowledge based on making sense of everyday life. When it comes to child-centred formulations, in the introductory section entitled ‘Development and learning’, the curriculum states, that:

A sense of exploration, curiosity and desire to learn should form the foundations for the preschool activities. These should be based on the child’s experiences, interests, needs and views. The flow of the child’s thoughts and ideas should be used to create variety in learning. (Curriculum for the preschool. Lpfö, 1998, p. 9)

The words ‘curiosity and desire’ in the first sentence highlight the subjective and positive experiences of the child and relate them to the core of education. In the second sentence, the agency of the child is indirectly linked to further dimensions of their subjective world and agency. In the following section of the curriculum with the heading ‘Influence of the child’, it is stated that:

The needs and interests which children themselves express in different ways should provide the foundation for shaping the environment and planning activities. (Curriculum for the preschool. Lpfö, 1998/2010, p. 12)

As in the first quote, the word ‘foundation’ is used in connection with ‘needs’ and ‘interests’ and is related to general activities in the pedagogical work.

The formulations in the new 2018 curriculum are more strongly in favour of a disciplinary and school-like knowledge. However, the similarities in the revised directives have not changed. In the new curriculum, the national curriculum has been added immediately before the directive on children’s interests and experiences.

Education in the preschool should take its starting point in the curriculum and in children’s needs, experiences and what they show an interest in. The flow of children’s thoughts and ideas should be utilised to create diversity in learning. (LPFÖ 2018, p. 14)

Thus, the focus on the experiences and interests of the child is somewhat weakened. Regarding the second directive about children’s influence, in the new curriculum, the directive basically remains the same, apart from the last word ‘activities’ in LPFÖ 1998, which in the 2018 version has been changed to ‘education’.

The needs and interests that the children themselves express in different ways should provide the foundation for shaping the environment and planning the education. (LPFÖ 2018, p. 17)

This change of wording represents a rather more school-like curriculum. It is however possible for preschool teachers to interpret the first directive in the light of the second, which is more explicit when it comes to the agency of the child and the notion of experiential knowledge. This offers the possibility to use an approach similar to that stated in the 1998/2010 version.

The tension between disciplinary knowledge becomes visible through the simultaneous presence of formulations in which the teacher is expected to perform agency. The following directives are also slightly revised in LPFÖ 2018. Even though the most prominent teacher-centred directives in the curriculum are implicit, this does not make them less powerful. For example, in maths and science, the goals in the 1998/2010 and 2018 versions, below, state that children should:

develop their understanding of space, shapes, location and direction, and the basic properties of sets, quantity, order and number concepts, also for measurement, time and change. (Curriculum for the preschool. Lpfö, 1998/2010, p. 10)

develop an understanding of space, time and form, and the basic properties of sets, patterns, quantities, order, numbers, measurement and change, and to reason mathematically about this. (LPFÖ 2018, p. 15)

develop their ability to distinguish, express, examine and use mathematical concepts and their interrelationships. (Curriculum for the preschool. Lpfö, 1998/2010, p. 10)

develop an ability to discern, express, investigate and use mathematical concepts and their interrelationships. (LPFÖ 2018, p. 15)

In science, children are also expected to:

develop their interest and understanding of the different cycles in nature, and how people, nature and society influence each other. (Curriculum for the preschool. Lpfö, 1998/2010, p. 10)

develop an understanding of relationships in nature and different cycles in nature, and how people, nature and society affect each other. (LPFÖ 2018, p. 15)

In the above quotes, there is a somewhat stronger emphasis on disciplinary knowledge in the 2018 version, although however these changes do not alter the mission of the preschool teacher to any great extent. Although the teacher is not directly mentioned, it is apparently only through the agency of the teacher relying on disciplinary knowledge (Deng & Luke, 2008) that these goals can be implemented in the daily life of the preschool. According to Folke-Fichtelius (2008), tensions between the freedom of the child and the reproduction of traditional knowledge are also tied to the question of the boundary between the preschool and school. Since the reform in 2010, this boundary has moved more towards school – a complexity that is highlighted below.

Design

In order to address the complexities of interpreting the purpose of national policy, qualitative interviews were conducted in the preschools involved in the study. Ten preschool teachers participated in the study and talked about their specific socio-geographic environments (approximately 50 minutes each). In order to approach preschool teachers' policy talk, the interviews were designed as semi-structured conversations between the preschool teachers and the researcher as a teacher educator addressing national policy, particularly regarding child- and subject-centeredness. The data were collected in a variety of social-cultural environments, such as middle-class areas with a high degree of cultural and economic capital ($n = 4/10$), multi-ethnic areas with a lesser degree of cultural and economic capital ($n = 5/10$) and a mixed area in terms of the degree of cultural and economic capital ($n = 1/10$). Seven preschools were visited. In three of the preschools, one teacher responsible for educational development was interviewed and one teacher with no such responsibility. However, no typical features were identified between the three preschool teachers with special responsibility for educational development. The interviews were all transcribed verbatim.

An interview guide was distributed before the interviews took place and was read by all the participating preschool teachers (except one) before the interviews were conducted. The preschool teachers were informed about the project in advance, including their rights in relation to participation, protection of their identities and the secure storage of the data. In order to address policy, the interview guide addressed the preschool as preparation for school vs. a tradition in its own right, the children's

experiences vs. a focus on subject goals, how the preschool teacher worked with the school-like goals and how these goals were documented (cf. Cohen 2008; Sheridan et al., 2011). As already indicated, the curriculum was revised after the interviews were conducted, although the tensions between subject and child are still apparent in the new curriculum, LPFÖ 2018.

Methodology

From the perspective of enacted policy, the point is not to locate preschool teachers' interpretations in either the national curriculum or the preschool teachers' policy talk, but instead to go deeper into the whole complex enacted policy in which the national curriculum is re-contextualized in the local context (Ball et al., 2012). The interview transcripts were read and analysed systematically, with attention being paid to policy talk about what was regarded as multi-layered, messy and conflicting (Maguire et al., 2015), such as the simultaneousness of contradictory tension-filled national policies and the interpretational work done by the preschool teachers, i.e. policy actors. In the preliminary analysis of each interview, tensions were identified throughout the transcript as a whole at the global level and in the utterances and/or interaction sequences at the local level. Deng and Luke (2008) analytical distinction between curriculum as disciplinary and experiential was taken as the point of departure for discerning these tensions. The preschool teachers' views of national policy were also noted (Maguire et al., 2015). In order to get a sense of the interactional flows in the interviews, the interviewer's responses and support signals – which also contributed to the conversation – have been included in the transcripts.² The timing of the utterance is presented in the example heading to show where the excerpts are located in the interview.

Between the layers of child- and subject-centeredness

The interviews show that the preschool teachers approached their mission to reconcile the subject with a tension-filled reasoning regarding knowledge. A broad overview shows how these conflicting themes emerged in the interviews when the purpose of the preschool was related to the national curriculum. For example, this was done by viewing the child as already competent yet consciously arranging the activities according to subject goals (Astrid), working in a child-centred way yet leaning towards subject goals (Isabelle), mainly *offering* children learning possibilities but pushing them in order to include every child in subject knowledge (Jenny), addressing subject knowledge for 'the children' but discriminating

according to the ages of the children (Lotta, Margareta), prioritizing certain goals (and downplaying others) due to the interests of the children (Siv, Bea), introducing a school-like subject but confirming that the children are already very good in the subjects, e.g. maths (Agneta), having the child as the point of departure but preparing every child for school (Carolina), claiming to work from the subject goals while omitting their details and narrowing down the content in order to adapt it to the children (Lotta, Margareta and Catarina).

In terms of curricular knowledge as disciplinary and experiential, the notion of the child as already competent, as expressed by many of the interviewees (cf. Liljestrand & Hammarberg, 2017), implies that the everyday life experiences of the child are crucial. Children have already structured their experiences and are further prepared to continue to do so without any need for disciplinary knowledge. Likewise, the reference to the interests of the child implies that these interests are not dependent on a disciplinary-based knowledge, but on the child's own experiences.

However, there are also tension-filled approaches to disciplinary knowledge in terms of whether this knowledge is judged as necessary or optional. This also depends on the ages of the children and the prioritization of certain goals. Furthermore, children are expected to choose the extent to which they are interested in disciplinary knowledge. Thus, the above themes appear as multi-layered ways of enacting the national policy. The enacted policy reveals simultaneous and conflicting themes regarding the purpose of the preschool.³

We will now take a closer look from some representatively chosen preschool teachers following them in different parts in the interviews. When addressing the purpose of the preschool, and when the 'child' and comparisons with school were addressed, the preschool teachers drew on experiential, child-centred talk. The boundaries (Folke-Fichtelius, 2008) between child- and subject centeredness were manifested when the preschool was compared with school. However, when the school-like goals in the curriculum were in focus during the interviews, disciplinary teacher-centred interpretations were prominent and where the boundaries distinguishing the preschool from school were dissolved. These opposing themes were mostly located in different contexts in the individual interviews and appeared as two different and parallel purposes, rather than as one coherent purpose.

This pattern is demonstrated by examples from three interviews in the data collection. In a longer sequence, focusing on the local action-plan, Hedvig explicitly addresses the children's interests as the general guiding principle by connecting the children's interests with what was happening in their immediate environment.

EXAMPLE 1 [Time: 11.35]

H: We can see a lot of vehicles at present

J: Yes

H: There was quite a lot of water also for a while, because it's spring and there's likely to be more when it thaws. Yes, but do you understand?

J: Yes

H: They [it's the children who decide,

J: [Yes, yes

H: We explore what they want to explore

The examples with vehicles and water are presented in order to convince the interviewer about the children's agency in the pedagogical activities. The example reflects a child-centred tradition by referring to the experiences of the children in the here and now (cf. Ackesjö & Persson, 2016) and their experience of vehicles. The excerpt is similar to the intentions of the national curriculum and its child-centred formulations. In the next example, some minutes later, the relationship between the general goals becomes more complex in that it is characterized by both a child-centred and subject-centred focus.

EXAMPLE 2 [Time: 14.40]

H: [...] we're obliged to work with certain things

J: mm

H: some of which are prioritized goals.hh and we have to work with all the goals in the preschool curriculum.

H: and in that sense, everything that we do can probably be included.

J: mm

H: but – but we have to start from the children I think (.) if the learning is to be enjoyable.

J: mm

H: You have to start from where they are. If (2.0) boys are running around you have to find [J: mm] something interesting for them to do so they will also indirectly be a little bit more prepared. But they (.)

J: But if you think too much about 'this is what it'll be like at school' then isn't a bit too controlled?

H: Yes, I don't think it should be (.) too like school because then when they move up to the preschool class it'll be a bit in-between

In this excerpt, Hedvig successively moves from a subject-centred to a child-centred pedagogy. She initially states that every goal should be included

and that the goals can be implemented in the activities the children themselves initiate. Her choice of words makes the excerpt inherently dilemmatic, a feature that is also found in the study of Otterstad and Braathe (2016) and contributes to reservation and vagueness. When addressing the school-like goals, Hedvig uses distancing expressions like 'probably' and refers to herself as an interpreter of the curriculum with the words 'in that sense'; policy enactment thus being flavoured by what Maguire et al. (2015) call the positioning of the teacher in the enactment of policy. She starts by pointing out that they are 'obliged' and when addressing preparedness for school she uses the distancing expression, 'a little bit', which also contributes to making her talk dilemmatic and vague. Further, when the researcher suggests that the preschool should be different from school, Hedvig aligns with this by comparing the preschool's task with that of the preschool class in the nine-year compulsory school system.

A few minutes later in the interview, Hedvig responds to the interviewer's comment that many of the preschool's goals are similar to those in school. Here, her response refers to the school-like goals in the national curriculum. She begins by addressing a pedagogical practice that is related to the immediate environment but continues with concept formations and the need to supply the children with conceptual knowledge through a disciplinary approach.

EXAMPLE 3 [Time: 16.40]

- J: there you could say that a lot of the goals are quite school-like.
 H: Yes, but we also use a few concepts there (.) because when we – we have- we have Kinetic Sand [J: mm] that we work with inside, in that the sand is frozen outside now.
 J: mm
 H: we have geometrical shapes (1.0) like hexagons and rectangles [oh
 J: [yes, of course
 H: and squares and small and large circles (.) so that we can [J: mm] indirectly inject those concepts as well.

At the end of the sequence, the agency for the learning of concepts depends on the preschool teacher and not on the initiatives and experiences of the children. Hedvig uses the word 'indirectly' and talks in a way that corresponds with traditional teaching in the classroom, albeit with her reservation and indicated positioning of not teaching explicitly (like in school). This excerpt is in

(sharp) tension with example 2 above and, in particular, with example 1.

A subject-centred repertoire characterized by preparation for school is found in the interview with Isabelle. In the excerpt below, she relates the activities in the preschool to those of school, which also links the preschool to another educational system. Here the language is not child-centred and experiential, because she actualizes the external obligations despite any possible resistance from the child. She explains that children may react differently to the content and uses gestures to illustrate their various reactions.

EXAMPLE 4 [Time: 20.55]

- I: it's also the case that if you have one group etc (2.0) these and those- that's what it says in the curriculum
 J: mm
 I: these are the goals we should have (.) some are there (.) and some are here.
 J: mm
 I: and some perhaps even don't come in here because they have- t- those we have to give.
 J: mm
 I: and then it's- then you have to chip away at that with school (.)
 J: mm
 I: I mean you can't just 'no, but that one's not interested in pen and paper'.
 J: Nay:
 I: No but that one will in the end sit and write (.) that one should be able to draw.
 J: mm
 I: I mean there's so many 'shoulds' (.)
 J: mm
 I: in school.
 J: yes:
 I: so we must, kind of – except those children refuse so we have to give them opportunities.

However, later in the interview, Isabelle adopts a more generalized child-centred discourse. Her response is preceded by a question from the interviewer (prefacing the excerpt) about the possible need to relinquish the goals due to the children's lack of interest. Isabelle addresses the goals in maths (mentioned in the question from the interviewer), but in a thin way that is now related to the situation at hand. In example 5, the emphasis is on a child-centred pedagogy that is based on each child's experiences.

EXAMPLE 5 [Time: 23.30]

J: But it happens that sometimes you just have to drop it and say that 'now- now we won't talk any more about maths' or 'now we won't talk more about-'

I: Yes, because they can say something different. hh it's all about being child-centred, that there's a child's perspective.

[I mean, what do the children want? My aim is to get through all these goals.

J: [mm

J: yes

I: I should give them mathematical symbols. But then if its (.) once

J: mm

I: or 20 times,

J: mm

I: It depends on what kind of group it is (.) or who the individual is.

J: yes, of course

(2.0)

J: mm

I: It's not about (.) learning (.) mathematical (.) symbols.

J: I see

I: It's just about becoming familiar with them.

In her first comments, Isabelle makes it clear that 'it's all about being child-centred'.⁴ Although her final comment is similar, it distinguishes between the goals to be fulfilled in school and those to strive for in the preschool. However, even if they are formulated in terms of goals to strive for, the interest in fulfilling them may not necessarily be shared by the child, which makes her approach to the goals obviously thinner in contrast to her subject-centred talk in example 4.

In the following example about how the school-like goals of the national curriculum are approached, preschool teacher Catarina describes excursions to the forest, which shows how a traditional outdoor activity is reformulated into a new policy context. The outdoor visits are initially described as experiential child-centred activities, but end up as an attempt to include preparation for school literacy.

EXAMPLE 6 [Time: 8.50]

C: We have- we have to start with the children's interests so we shouldn't make too much heavy weather of it either.

J: mm (.) I see

C: So that's how it is – you can perhaps introduce them a bit (.) that we can take textbooks with us.

J: mm

C: But it should begin with the children (.) because we can't insist on anything but must listen to them.

J: mm

C: But it's also- if you take textbooks with you- they can look at them (.) so that's a kind of preparation

J: yes

C: that they can check things in the books and read a lot of information

J: But then you're not really in the forest in the same way (.) they are not in forest as (1.0)

C: No

J: Being there

C: No.

J: So it's perhaps not really the same thing.

C: Mm.

J: Yes. I think that it's a strong-

C: But it's- you perhaps need to try to balance it a bit as well

J: mm

C: You anyway want it to be good because it's a big step to school from preschool (.) no, it is- yes.

The last line is formulated as an appraisal of school pedagogy 'you anyway want it to be good', which links children's activities beyond their current interests to the disciplinary literacy activities that they are likely to encounter at school. In the excerpts used in examples 1–6, the experiential child-centred tradition is made visible by reference to the children's present experiences, whereas in the disciplinary teacher-centred tradition, the implicit teacher agency points beyond the immediate experience of the child to predefined subject goals or a later stage in the education system. Tensions between the two basic interpretations are sometimes also manifested locally, as is visibly exemplified in the last excerpt. These excerpts show how preschool teachers' policy talk about achieving enacted policy is intertwined with the national preschool policy and exemplifies how different and contradictory 'policies are simultaneously in circulation and interact with, influence and inhibit each other' (Maguire et al., 2015, p. 488).

Discussion and conclusion

As Kaga (2017) points out, research on the purpose of Swedish preschool policy and its relationship to the

primary school is too often absent and instead focuses on issues regarding its implementation. The enacted policy investigated in this article highlights the tensions that are present in preschool teachers' interpretations of national policy. The analysis of preschool teachers' policy talk, through the lens of enacted policy complemented by curriculum theory, shows a separate, non-integrated tension between disciplinary and experiential knowledge. This recurrent pattern appears both in the general patterns of the preschool teachers (as shown in the first part of the result), between the interview sequences in the interviews, and within the sequences of the preschool teachers. This study has not adopted a perspective of policy implementation due to the tensions that are already present in national policy. The analytical approach does not therefore locate the incoherence in the lack of support for the preschool teachers or in terms of further education and support materials. I argue that this finding also makes sense in the new 2018 curriculum, even though the interviews were conducted with reference to the curriculum of 1998/2010.

Similar to Granbom's study of preschool teachers (Granbom, 2011), the study identifies a relationship between freedom and government, and a visible tension between the autonomy of the children, on the one hand, and the implementation of subject goals, on the other (Ackesjö & Persson, 2016; Due et al., 2018). The results from Otterstad and Braathe (2016) study of how Norwegian preschool teachers resist a school-like discourse also find support in this study. This study adds how such patterns of enacted policy can be found to oscillate between the notion of the competent child and the child that is not introduced to subjects, and between younger and older preschool children. Furthermore, this study adds descriptions of how tensions appear at the micro conversational level.

It can be argued that these tensions appear because they are not integrated into a national policy that has a strong tradition of child-centred discourse (e.g. Due et al., 2018) and the notion of the already competent child (Liljestrand & Hammarberg, 2017) in its enactments. The ambivalence in national policy could further be related to Swedish preschool education as optional and with mixed age groups, in contrast to the compulsory school. Although this does not make the ambivalences between the disciplinary and the experiential more apparent, it partly explains why they are more likely to appear in the preschool than in school, and why a child-centred tradition is more likely to take root in the preschool.

If the tradition of child-centred and experiential knowledge (including the notion of the competent child) remains strong, it will be possible for preschool teachers to legitimize this tradition due to the

presence of (enough) child-centred directives in the national curriculum, which may in turn have consequences for the enactment of the new curriculum. If this is the case, preschool teachers and the role of the preschool will appear as ambivalent in terms of their purposes in the Swedish educational system. However, from a professional point of view, understanding the role of the preschool in the educational system is important too, in that it enables (preschool) teachers to see their mission as bigger than simply performing demarcated tasks. As the study of Sundberg et al. (2016) indicates, the tension in the national curriculum may also give rise to problems of continuity in the teachers' pedagogical work with the children. This means that ambivalences in national policy may have practical consequences for both teachers and children, even if these tensions are handled creatively (Liljestrand, 2020) in other situations.

Notes

1. Lecture held on 30 November 2017 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gyPs6wSl4NM>, after 8 minutes. Retrieved 10/08/2018.
2. The symbols used in the transcript are (.) for a micropause or change in speech rhythm; (1,0) for one second's pause; [] two vertical square brackets signal simultaneous speech.
3. This pattern differs from how the same preschool teachers described their practical work with the school-like goals, i.e. they themselves implemented the goals (Liljestrand, 2020).
4. Example 5 is characterized by how the teacher distances herself from the goals; an approach that is also visible in Enös' (2005) study of preschool teachers in the school context. A further observation from the interviews is that many preschool teachers think that the details in the subject goals are not foregrounded, but that the overall idea of the goals are.

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ORCID

Johan Liljestrand  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4439-6169>

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