Redefining *Undervisning* for Swedish Preschool

Viewing preschool teachers’ conceptions of teaching through Cultural Historical Activity Theory

**Course:** Thesis Project, 15.0 credits

**Program:** EDUCARE: The Swedish Preschool Model

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**Semester:** Spring, 2018
Abstract

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Number of pages: 31

Recent reports by the Swedish School Inspectorate have shown preschool teachers’ understanding of their teaching mission to be complex and the responsibility of teaching in preschool, multifaceted. While the school law places responsibility for goal-directed teaching on preschool teachers, the current Swedish preschool curriculum makes no mention of the concept of teaching, defined in Swedish as undervisning. This study examines contradictions between the domains of Swedish preschool education research, policy, and practice as visible in pre-service and in-service preschool teachers’ conceptions of teaching, as it is delineated in the steering documents, and as it is evident in the classroom. The research questions are how do pre-service and in-service preschool teachers conceptualize teaching, as it is defined in government steering documents? What do pre-service and in-service preschool teachers see as evidence of teaching in their classrooms, and how do they determine their role in teaching? Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) was used to formulate and analyze semi-structured individual interviews of pre-service and in-service preschool teachers to consider the teachers’ conceptions of teaching as a product of the historical and cultural mediated activity system of preschool. Analysis of interview transcripts highlighted how complex not only the practice of teaching is for preschool teachers, but also how there is no consensus around the definition of teaching in Swedish preschools. If preschool teachers are to abide by steering documents and undertake teaching in their practice, there needs to be a new inclusive definition that imparts some clarity to preschool teaching. The new working definition, theorized using Leontiev’s hierarchy of activity, action, and operation, may help researchers, policy makers, and preschool teachers negotiate some of the confusion surrounding how to adopt and adapt teaching into Swedish preschool.

Key words: teaching, undervisning, preschool, play, contradictions, activity theory, Leontiev
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1 Introduction

Preschool in Sweden was founded on Fröbel pedagogy, stressing the concept of a free child exploring and moving through the world without much adult steering (Hammarström-Lewenhagen, 2013). Care, nurturing, and social development have been the epicenter of Swedish preschool culture and pedagogy (Bennett, 2005; Hammarström-Lewenhagen, 2013; OECD, 2006); however, international beliefs observed by Moss (2006) associate high quality preschool with economic benefits, placing a quality emphasis on preschool and stress on preschool teachers to focus more on academic development. Preschool teachers in Sweden have not been shielded from the quality debate. Changes to the curriculum and steering documents have resulted in preschool teachers feeling more pressure to engage in teaching (Alvestad & Berge, 2009; Löfdahl Hultman, Folke-Fichtelius & Löfgren, 2015). The revised curriculum (Skolverket, 2011) stresses the need for teachers to provide stimulation and guidance to expose children to different disciplines, such as mathematics, language, science, and technology, to strive for curriculum goals. These preschool goals, which are to strive for, contrast with compulsory school goals which are intended to be reached. Even with more academic curriculum goals, social development, care, and well-being are still encouraged and cultivated in the preschool classrooms (SFS, 2010: 800; Skolverket, 2011, Skolinspektionen, 2017, 2018).

The Swedish preschool curriculum does not embolden teaching; there is no reference to the word in the 2011 revised edition. The 2010 Swedish school law (SFS 2010: 800) does use the word teaching; it is defined as a goal-directed process, by compulsory or preschool teachers, to develop learning through the acquisition and development of knowledge and values. There exists a double emphasis for preschool teachers now, as the proposed revision to the school law states: “preschools fall within the scope of teaching, however, this does not change the preschool's assignment or activity and does not call into question the teaching and working methods used there for a long time” (Prop. 2009/10: 165, p. 217, translated). Teachers must uphold the historic foundations of care and nurturing, while preparing young children for the academic and developmental rigor of compulsory school (Bennett, 2005).

The inclusion or exclusion of the word teaching in Swedish steering documents is becoming a complex issue (Nilsson, Lecusay, & Alnervik, in press; Westman & Bergmark, 2013). Due to this misalignment in steering documents, researchers have noted the many different variables that influence teachers’ interpretations and implementation of teaching in practice (Hedefalk, Almqvist, & Lundqvist, 2015; Jonsson, Williams, & Pramling Samuelsson, 2017; Westman & Bergmark, 2013). In 2018, the Swedish government plans to release a revised
preschool curriculum that uses the word *teaching*. As drafts have gone through commenting and editing by researchers, organizations, and the preschool communities, mutual understanding of how the concept of teaching in preschool should be understood and practiced has not emerged (Skolverket, 2017). Skolinspektionen (2017, 2018), (Swedish school inspectorate) noted in their recent quality assessments that despite the mission to provide all children in Sweden with high quality preschool, the lack of understanding of the concept *teaching* is leading to large variations in the quality and content offered to children and families. Preschool teachers are evading the new teaching mission in the school law and their discussions around teaching are vague and enigmatic (Skolinspektionen, 2018). As Sweden becomes more diverse, the importance of quality and equivalence in preschool is of paramount importance. Taking into consideration the values and foundation of preschool -- the original intent being a place where working or studying parents could bring their children, a place where care is a priority and the agency of a child is valued -- how does the concept of teaching emanate from preschool culture and classrooms? The aim of this study is to examine contradictions between the domains of Swedish preschool education research, policy, and practice as visible in pre-service and in-service preschool teachers’ conceptions of teaching, as it is delineated in the steering documents, and as it is evident in the classroom.

The results of this study point to important insights about teachers’ current understanding of their teaching mission and how their individual interpretations of steering documents highlight a unique intentional practice. Examining and reflecting on contradictions between policy and practice can potentially evolve preschool to empower children’s agency alongside curriculum goals and teachers’ intentions; instilling an inclusive Swedish preschool.

2 Swedish Preschool

Preschool has a long history in Sweden, priorities to establish a safe environment for children to learn have been a part of Swedish culture since the middle of the 19th century (Korpi & Turner, 2007). As equality became an integral part of Swedish culture, so too did the concept of quality family and welfare policy for all; childcare became the cornerstone of Swedish welfare policy (Hammarström-Lewenhagen, 2013; Korpi & Turner, 2007; SFS, 2010: 800; Skolverket, 2000). More women began to enter the workforce, becoming supporters of the family inside and outside the home. The need for childcare rose and families began to demand quality childcare, irrespective of income and location (Hammarström-Lewenhagen, 2013; Korpi, & Turner, 2007; Skolverket, 2000). In the 1970s, the Swedish Preschool Act ruled that quality child care centers, with staff trained to cooperate with the home, and pedagogical activities grounded in play, care,
and exploration, were a good environment for children to grow up in; preschool became a right (Korpi & Turner, 2007; Skolverket, 2000, 2010). As preschool quality became a bigger concern, the institution of preschool moved from the welfare sector, and was incorporated into the education sector. This was done to change the mindset that early childhood education and care (ECEC) was solely childcare, a component of family policy, into the approach of ECEC as preschool, which plays an integral part in the education system. With the transition to the education sector, the first preschool curriculum was introduced in 1998. The main quality measures in the curriculum focus on “the organization, content and actions developed by preschool in an effort to provide children with the best possible conditions for learning and development” (Skolverket, 2011, p. 14).

Combining the historical foundation in care and nurturing with the forward-thinking intention of preparation for school and lifelong learning, the term *educare* was developed to describe ECEC in Sweden. Education and care come together to encompass the many goals and priorities that have developed with Swedish preschool, an institution grounded in play, pedagogy, learning, and democracy. The practice of educare embraces holistic teaching methods fostering care and social development, while providing new learning experiences for children (Hammarström-Lewenhagen, 2013; OECD, 2006; Skolverket, 2010).

The 1998 preschool curriculum, and subsequent revisions, continue to place care, nurturing, and social development at the epicenter of Swedish preschool culture and pedagogy (OECD, 2006; SFS, 2010: 800; Skolverket, 2011). But, Moss has observed international opinions affirming high quality ECEC is crucial to compete economically and aid in stemming social problems. This places a quality emphasis on preschool and puts stress on ECEC staff to practice more academic developmental pedagogies (Moss, 2006). Teachers in Sweden have felt the effects from these quality debates in ECEC. Changes to steering documents advising more documentation and emphasis on children’s learning have been regarded as movement in the direction toward the school readiness tradition; in response, teachers feel more pressure to engage in teaching (Alvestad & Berge, 2009; Löfdahl Hultman, et al., 2015). The double emphasis for preschool teachers to prioritize care and nurturing, while preparing young children for the academic and developmental rigor of compulsory school creates a complex and multifaceted preschool teaching profession (Bennett, 2005).

Bennet (2005) has discussed broad developmental goals and focused cognitive goals as the two ends of the preschool pedagogy continuum. Broad developmental goals are closely related to the traditional Swedish and Nordic perspectives of ECEC, a social pedagogy approach. Here, social and emotional development and well-being are emphasized. On the other end of the
spectrum, focused cognitive goals, teachers will often steer activities to reach academic goals; primary school curriculum influences can be readily identified in this preschool pedagogy. If education policy makers associate economic success with the increased acquisition of academic skills and embrace more formal instruction to preschool, it could be detrimental to young children attending preschool, and the larger community (Bennett, 2005). On the other hand, avoiding cognitive and academic goals could hold children back from their natural desire to learn and reaching their social and academic potential.

The practice of preschool should not be polarized by these two dominating discourses of pedagogy. Bennett suggests that effective preschool pedagogy will provide potential for both exploration and learning, grounded in child-initiated play and activities in which “educators guide, inform, model and instruct, but do not dominate the child’s thinking” (Bennett, 2005, p. 17).

2.1 The Policy of Swedish Preschool

The curriculum states preschool should be an enjoyable, safe, and rich learning environment, and that teachers should apply a holistic approach to children’s development (Skolverket, 2011). The curriculum lays out broad goals for preschools, grounded in children’s social and cognitive development. The curriculum goes on to detail that preschool activities should be structured to elevate children’s play and exploration, giving children agency while still oriented towards the curriculum goals. The curriculum uses words like stimulate and guide, not teaching, to describe how teachers should conceive of their efforts to promote learning (Skolverket, 2011).

Although the revised curriculum and the school law were developed during the same period, the Swedish school law (SFS, 2010: 800) groups preschool with compulsory school’s definition of teaching as a goal-directed process. The mission of preschool has changed, preschool teachers are now responsible for teaching. The school law revisions are proving to have a pedagogical effect as preschool moves away from the social pedagogy tradition towards the readiness for school pedagogical traditions (Alvestad & Berge, 2009; Löfdahl Hultman, et al., 2015; OECD, 2006).

2.2 The Contradiction of Teaching in Swedish Preschool

Despite the practice of preschool outlined in the curriculum, research has shown that teachers are unaware of how to appropriately balance goal-directed teaching that would both follow children’s play and initiatives, and accomplish teachers’ curriculum goals (Björklund, 2014; Cremin, Glauert, Craft, Compton, & Stylianidou, 2015; Nilsson, Ferholt, & Lecusay, 2017; Siraj Blatchford, 2010; Skjaeveland, 2017; Skolinspektionen, 2016, 2018). The aggregation of guidelines and goals in the curriculum, although detailed, is also vague and teaching strategies are
left to be interpreted by the municipalities, preschools, and teachers (Sheridan, Williams, Sandberg & Vuorinen, 2011).

There has been an increase in research trying to understand preschool teachers’ relationship with teaching in their classrooms (Hedefalk et al., 2015; Helenius, Johansson, Lange, Meaney, & Wernberg, 2016; Jonsson et al., 2017; Klaar & Öhman, 2014; Ljung-Djärf, Brante, Olander, 2014; Nilsson et al., 2017; Westman & Bergmark, 2013). Even though it is not defined, teaching is perceived as a core component of daily preschool life (Ljung-Djärf et al., 2014; Norling, 2014; Öqvist & Cervantes, 2018), even, as Hedefalk et al. (2015) observed, when there are no specific teaching goals defined by teachers. The lack of teaching goals has been noted and critiqued by Skolinspektionen and other researchers, saying that because goals are not defined prior to activities, the teachers are not teaching to the curriculum (Helenius et al., 2016; Jonsson et al., 2017; Sheridan, Williams & Pramling Samuelsson, 2014; Skolinspektionen, 2018). This could be the difference between spontaneous teaching, where teaching opportunities are grasped in the moment, most likely during play, without detailed planning, and planned teaching, where curriculum goals are discussed and fit into pre-planned activities and/or long-term projects (Klaar & Öhman, 2013). Despite this, recent research has shown teachers are directing the children’s learning in a competent way, even if it is not planned, systematic, or transparent. Hedefalk et al. (2015) show that although most of the teaching moments in preschool are spontaneous, children are taking part and learning a great deal. In another study, examining preschool teachers’ experiences teaching scientific concepts, the teachers experienced a stronger connection to their teaching mission and the children when focusing on aesthetics, democracy, experimentation and reflection; a stark contrast to the more academic goal-directed teaching mission in the school law (Westman & Bergmark, 2013). It doesn’t appear that teaching requires the systematic component that the new Swedish policy and steering documents are endorsing.

Other researchers have observed that when teachers shifted their emphasis to focus on discernible learning objects in the curriculum, they expressed an increased awareness and understanding of the intended learning in preschool (Ljung-Djärf et al., 2014). Structured and pre-planned lessons, focused around play, but closely pivoting learning objects, can be engaging and interesting for preschool children. When activities were oriented in this way, Ljung-Djärf et al. (2014) observed play was no longer a distraction from meeting learning objectives, and the teachers’ professional role was not abandoned when engaging in fantasy play with the children. These competing research perspectives show aligning preschool with more academic goals that encourage mathematics, literacy, technology, and science, while sustaining the care and nurturing that are the building blocks of Swedish preschool, is difficult for teachers to maintain, and
sometimes contradictory (Bennett, 2005; Ljung-Djärf et al., 2014; Moss, 2006; Westman & Bergmark, 2013).

Conflicting research surrounding preschool pedagogy and teaching strategies can fit along a continuum, similar to Bennett’s (2005) above. Ideologies and pedagogical preference are evident in the different groups of researchers examining Swedish preschool, and when considering the research field as a whole, there can be many conflicting pedagogies.

While considering children’s right to learn in preschool, and teachers’ curricular demands, Jonsson et al. (2017) regarded teaching and learning as two facets of a reciprocal relationship, where teaching continuously strengthens all children’s learning. If teachers are to have more meaningful and academically useful interactions in preschool, Jonsson, et al., claim teachers must identify learning objects, and maximize and expand children’s knowledge through goal-directed teaching. Avoiding dichotomization of education and care is important for Swedish preschool (Siraj-Blatchford, 2010a, cited in Jonsson et al. 2017, p. 94), but providing high quality preschool activities where the social and cognitive development of children is equally important, may be too challenging without teacher identified learning objects. Children can be active learners in the preschool environment, but without teaching, children’s independent learning is not enough to attend to curriculum goals (Jonsson et al., 2017). Balancing children’s right to learn with the demands of the curriculum can embolden well educated preschool teachers to take advantage of children’s natural desire to learn by “directing children’s interests at the content dimensions our culture values” (Jonsson et al., 2017, p. 106, translated). Teachers identify learning objects and attend to children’s interests by uniting the two in creative and meaningful ways that respect the children’s rights and the demands of the teachers.

Towards the opposite end of the spectrum, play is viewed as the catalyst for learning (Nilsson et al., 2017). Historically, a child’s understanding of the world arises from play and exploration; developmental change is not cultivated from adult-led formal learning. Because of this, Nilsson et al. argue play should be supported in preschool by joint adult-child pretend play that is engaging for children and their teachers. When teachers engage in teaching through planning and orienting toward curriculum goals, learning may occur, but only because the teaching has been systematized to allow learning (Nilsson et. al., 2017). In play, learning arises organically, and children, as experts of play, challenge both real and pretend worlds through their play, learning contextually all the while (Zosh, et al., 2017). Instead of dichotomizing play and learning, Nilsson et al. propose research and practice should focus on play and exploration, promoting cognitive and holistic curriculum goals. While there is no precedent for how to embed curriculum goals in preschool with goal-directed teaching, Nilsson et al. fear the
transmission model of teaching may become the norm as steering documents place more academic stress on the Swedish preschool practice.

These pedagogical research perspectives reflect a serious divide regarding how preschool teaching is understood and practiced in Sweden; and the inclusion or exclusion of teaching in steering documents further complicates defining teaching in preschool. In addition, the proposition for the revised school law (Prop. 2009/10:165) states that although preschool is covered by the term teaching it does not change the historic nature and holistic foundations of preschool. Language from both the social pedagogy and readiness for school traditions that are included in the preschool steering documents substantiate these tensions in preschool that have been observed in recent research. In the hope of illuminating this tension on a policy level, Skolinspektionen (2016) published an evaluation of preschool’s education assignment, showing that the new teaching mission is unclear to most preschools, and where the responsibility of teaching lies remains complex. Teachers are meeting the new teaching mission with apprehension and elusion (Skolinspektionen, 2016). Furthermore, the most recent quality report by Skolinspektionen (2018) suggests teaching as a goal-directed process should be a part of the educational assignment of preschool, and that the concept of teaching and how it is carried out in preschools needs to be clarified. Some important questions for research on this topic are-- How do teachers navigate this dichotomy between the holistic and care-oriented mission in the curriculum, and the relatively recent academic goal-directed advisement in steering documents? And are there any consequences of this dichotomy to their practice?

2.3 Theoretical Framework

In this study, Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) is used as a methodological framework that guides the data collection and interpretation. CHAT has proven valuable when examining the preschool environment as an activity system (Alnervik, 2013; Nilsson, 2003); there are many cultural historical mediators present that shape a teacher’s understanding of how teaching should be manifested in preschool. CHAT is based on the idea that humans engage in meaning-making by navigating and negotiating cultural artifacts present in their social environment. In CHAT, human activity is understood relationally and is always situated in a cultural and historical system (Cole 1996; Engeström, 2001). CHAT is utilized by researchers in qualitative research to understand long-term change in human learning and development using an activity system (Cole, 1996; Engeström, 2001). Activity systems are conceptualized in terms of various cultural artifacts like tools, community, rules, and division of labor, that mediate the relationship between a subject and their object, or in this case, preschool teachers and teaching as laid out in steering documents, respectively (See Figure 1). Artifacts present in activity systems serve as tools to
govern behavioral processes that can lead to personal and cultural change (Cole, 1996; Lecusay, Rossen & Cole, 2008).

Visualizing preschool through an activity system allows for consideration of how steering documents and Swedish culture, among other artifacts, mediate and shape the teachers’ practice. Furthermore, pairing CHAT with Dewey’s (1980) concepts surrounding direct and indirect teaching highlighted the important environmental element of the preschool teachers’ experiences. The activity system in Figure 1 was used to craft meaningful interview questions, this allowed for different mediators that both confront preschool teachers and affect their practice to be woven into the fabric of the teachers’ narratives. During analysis, Figure 1 was also used to visualize how the teachers can make meaning when organizing preschool around teaching to the curriculum.

![Figure 1: Preschool as an activity system (Modified from Engeström, 2001).](image-url)
Leontiev (1977), considered a founding figure of Activity Theory, argued that within the activity system, between a subject and their object, exists the hierarchy of activity, action, and operation. An activity, defined by its motive, is taken on by a community that shares the object. There is no activity without an object, and the motive for individual’s and collective communities’ actions emerges from this object (Leontiev, 1977; Kaptelinin, 2005). Actions are executed by individuals to fulfill goals that align with the overarching motive. In this system, activity and motive, and action and goals form correlative relationships. In contrast, an operation is a habituated action or behavior molded by time and precise conditions. Actions and operations emerge from a subject’s motive, and together they construct and reconstruct activities that define and individualize subjects and communities. It is not the individual’s actions in line with motives that form communities, though. Everyone needs to be cognizant of and interested in the motive, the common end. Relating to Dewey, participants in the activity “regulate their specific activity in view of it, then they [form] a community. But this would involve communication…Consensus demands communication” (Dewey, 1980, p. 8). In existing research literature, Leontiev’s hierarchy has been largely applied to researching human computer interaction (Kaptelinin, Kuutti, & Bannon, 1995). However, this hierarchy can also be applied to conceptualize how teaching is being shaped by preschool.

Viewing preschool as an activity system provided valuable perspectives during the initial research process, but as the interviews with teachers progressed, contradictions between policy and practice became more apparent. Engeström (2001) views contradictions as “historically accumulating structural tensions within and between activity systems” (p. 137). Considering preschool policy as a distinct activity system interacting with the preschool activity system began to illustrate the potential for dilemmas, disturbances, and/or innovations to manifest out of contradictions (Engeström & Sannino, 2010). External contradictions between these two neighboring activity systems are the result of the relatively new reorganization of the school law including preschool in the definition of teaching. Contradictions can be driving forces in expansive learning, where new objects and motives are constructed around a collective activity. This “requires articulation and practical engagement with [contradictions] of the learners’ activity system” (Engeström & Sannino, 2010, p. 5). Subjects in the neighboring activity systems apply their own sense and meaning to their activity potentially causing a clash of outcomes, but if critically examined, contradictions can provide opportunities to expand “up and down, outwards and inwards” (Engeström & Sannino, 2010, p. 21), tackling both contested objects and outcomes as well as subjectivity, emotions, personal sense, and morals. Figure 2 illustrates the contradictions between activity systems of preschool, and preschool policy institutions.
2.3.1 Teaching in the Swedish context

In Swedish, the concept of teaching is referred to as *undervisning*. *Undervisning* is defined as the mediation of knowledge in organized form, for instance in school education (SO, 2009, translated). Kroksmark (1997) characterizes *undervisning* as an intentional practice, contextually directing attention toward something specific. For the teachers, the concept of *undervisning* was clear--- *undervisning* happens in school--- formal learning everyone is familiar with, the transmission model of teaching. Despite this association, the teachers are encouraged to use the word in their documentation and practice. However, if they are interpreting the school law’s goal-directed definition of *undervisning* to mean transmission model, there will be implications to the goals and guidelines that have been at the core of Swedish preschool. Relating *undervisning* to the teachers’ practice and the requirements in the steering documents does not provide any clarity between personal preferences and assumptions of *undervisning*, and the definitions in the dictionary or school law. The practice of *undervisning*, especially in preschool, is sometimes undefined; and for
teachers, policy makers, and researchers to better understand how *undervisning* is interpreted and facilitated, the word needs to be broken down and discussed.

### 2.3.2 Goal-rational and goal-relational teaching

While the goal-directed definition of teaching is spelled out in the school law, there can still be multiple interpretations by municipalities, teachers, and researchers that have different pedagogical effects. Lind (2010) characterizes teaching as either goal-rational or goal-relational, the two main interpretations of goal-directed teaching we see in research and practice. In a goal-rational practice, questions are devised with little or no flexibility around discussing or creating new answers and knowledge. Teachers control and correct children to ensure they remain on the right knowledge path. This can be considered an objective quality centered teaching practice (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2007). In a goal-relational teaching practice, both the teacher and child negotiate the learning process where “new impulses, connections, and concepts can continually reveal new twists and turns” through investigation and exploration (Lind, 2010, p. 359, translated). This practice is less focused on quality and more on a subjective meaning-making experience. Where children and teachers co-construct and deepen their understanding of the world, and “prejudice, self-interest, and unacknowledged assumptions” are confronted (Dahlberg et. al., 2007, p. 113).

### 3 Research Aim and Questions

Preschool teachers in Sweden are negotiating contradictory messages. On the one hand, the steering documents describe teaching as a goal-directed process to develop learning through the acquisition and development of knowledge and values. On the other hand, the curriculum navigates around teaching by encouraging stimulation and guidance, without using the word *teaching* (SFS 2010: 800; Skolverket, 2011). Because of this misalignment, personal pedagogical preferences are dictating teaching strategies in preschool practice and research. The aim of this study is to highlight the contradictions between the domains of Swedish preschool education research, policy, and practice, as revealed by pre-service and in-service preschool teachers’ conceptions of teaching, as it is delineated in the steering documents, and how it is evident in the classroom.

#### 3.1 Research Questions

- How do pre-service and in-service preschool teachers conceptualize teaching, as it is defined in government steering documents?
• What do pre-service and in-service preschool teachers see as evidence of teaching in their classrooms, and how do they determine their role in teaching?

4 Methods
Drawing on qualitative research principles, interviews and the subsequent analyses were grounded in a cultural historical perspective. In this way, all human behavior is considered relationally, and allows for the collected data to be understood and interpreted as products of the social, historical, and cultural context each teacher occupies (Cole, 1996; Lawler, 2002).

4.1 Undervisning
During interviews teachers expressed that simply the word teaching is confusing in a preschool setting; using the word undervisning in the interviews, however, seemed to allow the teachers to make explicit connections between their own practice and the requirements in steering documents. In order to understand how preschool teachers conceptualize teaching occurring in their classrooms, undervisning was used in the interviews whenever possible. Where appropriate in the presentation of findings and analysis below, undervisning will be used to describe the concept of teaching, and undervisa will be used to describe the act of teaching.

4.2 Participants
Two pre-service and three in-service teachers were recruited from the preschool education program at a medium sized university in southern Sweden. Apart from one in-service teacher who has been teaching for 20 years, the remaining two are recent university graduates (January, 2017, 2018). Both groups come with experience from their Verksamhetsförlagd utbildning (VFU), practicum placement during university studies, where they have had experience working with every age of children in preschool. At the time of the interviews, the pre-service teachers had just completed a 5-week VFU, and the in-service teachers had full-time experience in preschool. Three of the five teachers also worked as barnskötare, or vikarie, (preschool teaching assistants, and substitutes) prior to their university studies.

4.3 Documentation Methods
Semi-structured individual interviews were conducted, focusing on the narrative dimensions of teachers’ interpretations of teaching and their role in preschool (Mason, 2002). The interviews

§¹ Definition of undervisa by Svensk Akademiens Ordbok (Swedish dictionary): convey knowledge to, usually verbal and in organized form (SO, 2009, translated).
were dialogic in nature, allowing for rambling, the goal being to prompt teachers to describe anecdotes of their recent classroom experiences. Prior to the interviews, the teachers were informed of the general research aim and a brief explanation of concepts hoping to be covered. An interview guide was constructed with questions that could both anticipate and ascertain the range of culture and context that preschool teachers encounter in their profession (Lawler, 2002; Mason, 2002).

During the interviews, questions were laid out to infer the relational nature of the teachers’ preschool experience. How teachers interpreted and identified their profession and their preschool experiences were understood to be situated in a particular time and place, and shaped by the social and cultural context of their preschool (Lenz Taguchi, 2007). Grounding the interviews in each teacher’s specific preschool context produces stories that represent, as best as possible, each teacher’s personal understanding of teaching, and avoids abstractions and generalities about the overall practice of teaching (Mason, 2002). The subsequent narratives that were constructed from the interviews provided the bulk of the data. The teachers’ narratives are understood not as simple fact-laden stories, but as the social product or artifact within each teachers’ preschool environment (Lawler, 2002). Narratives from the interviews were regarded as the device the teachers used to interpret the cultural historical environment that surrounds their profession and preschool.

Each interview lasted about an hour; the interviews were recorded, anonymized and transcribed for clarity and analysis. Teachers were given pseudonyms during transcription. In some cases, follow up questions asking for simple clarifications were sent over email. Both the researcher and the teachers were considered co-participants in the interview process to unearth the teachers’ experiences and understandings in an ontological and epistemological way (Mason, 2002).

4.4 Analysis

The raw transcripts from the interviews were analyzed to find commonalities, differences, and any policy/practice contradictions. Teaching narratives were constructed from the transcripts and interpreted from a cultural historical perspective, in relation to the institution of Swedish preschool, and each teacher’s individual preschool environment (Cole, 1996; Lawler, 2002). Considering the surrounding culture that permeates each teacher’s profession, with special consideration to influences from policy and practice, allowed for the content in the narratives to be interpreted as a representation of the many influences that impact preschool teaching. Through this consideration, the teachers’ conceptions of teaching can be understood relationally
to their culture and broken down to conceive a new working definition of what it means to practice teaching in a preschool setting.

The detailed stories from the interviews provided a social and environmental depiction of the teachers’ preschool experience; allowing for discourse analysis to highlight the teachers’ motives and intentions in their practice (Mukherji & Albon, 2015). Excerpts from interviews that highlighted mediating artifacts, like steering documents and personal pedagogical preferences (for more examples see Figure 1), were scrutinized to uncover recurring and contradictory themes between teachers’ perspectives. Themes that arose out of this analysis pointed to the importance of delineating when teaching occurs in preschool and how preschool teachers and support staff influence and impact the children’s experience through interactions. Teachers reflected on their licensed educated teaching role, and how they may have a different awareness than their colleagues. These themes highlighted the adaptable nature of the teachers’ preschool experience, and the importance they place on their reflective awareness and approach.

4.5 Ethical Considerations
Ethical protocols from the European Early Childhood Education Research Association (EECERA, 2015) were followed. Prior to the interviews, each teacher was sent an electronic copy of the research consent form detailing the research aim and the expectations of participating teachers. The consent form also informed the teachers that the data collected from the research and interviews would be anonymized, and that the teachers could withdraw from the research project at any time without consequence. During the interviews, teachers signed the physical consent form and were offered paper copies for their own records.

4.6 Validity, Reliability, and Generalizability
Teachers recruited for this research study(ied) and currently practice at the same university and geographic area in Sweden. The opinions and perspectives offered in the interviews do not represent the Swedish preschool experience as a whole. Although generalizability is low (Mukherji & Albon, 2015), their perspectives do offer an important glimpse into preschool teachers’ conceptions on teaching, and changes that are taking place at a time where policy and practice may be colliding.

The language of the teachers and the researcher has been taken into consideration. The interviews were conducted in English, the researcher’s native language, and the second or third language of the teachers. Although some misinterpretation and miscommunication may have taken place, both the teachers and the researcher made their best effort to clarify meaning and intention wherever possible.
For the sake of clarity, common filler components of speech such as “um,” and “hmm” were deleted from quotations in this text, unless they provided more meaning. As is common in spoken language, false sentence starters were also deleted, and sentence breaks were inputted textually to maintain original intent behind the speech, while improving the reader’s understanding.

5 Results: Preschool Teachers’ Perspectives

Contradictions between policy and practice present a divide in the understanding of the concept of teaching in Swedish preschools. Language from both social pedagogy and readiness for school traditions are present throughout steering documents, and the practice of teaching is often left to interpretation by municipalities, preschools, and teachers (Sheridan et al., 2011). It has become evident that in the research field, and the preschool profession, personal preference or beliefs are largely dictating how teaching manifests in practice (Alvestad & Sheridan, 2015; Einarsdottir, 2011; ERIC, 1999; Lynch & Owston, 2015; Westman & Bergmark, 2013). Recent quality inspections by Skolinspektionen (2017, 2018) found that teachers find the new teaching mission in the school law complex, and as a result, staff seem to lack knowledge and tools to strive for goals. Understanding teaching from preschool teachers’ perspectives can provide valuable insight into how teachers conceptualize their teaching mission as detailed in steering documents, and how they conceive teaching as evident in their classrooms.

5.1 Interpreting Undervisning Through Policy

Both pre- and in-service teachers felt that teaching has always been a part of preschool. However, when the school law included the word *undervisning*, there was push back from preschool teachers. Teachers don’t consider their work to fall under the steering document’s current goal-directed definition of *undervisning*; their practice is something more complex. Yet, during the interviews, when the teachers were asked how they felt about using the word *undervisning* in their practice, they agreed it was good for the profession, and including it in the curriculum would elevate their status as teachers. In anticipation for the revised curriculum, the teachers had all begun talking about *undervisning* with colleagues to discern what it means to *undervisa* in preschool. During these discussions, and for the current students and recent graduates, during their discussions in university classes, there was agreement that what is already happening in the preschool classrooms is *undervisning*; however, it is simply the word that is being avoided because of its inherent “school” association. Preschool teachers’ practice has never been in question, more simply, the word should be given new meaning; *undervisning* is already taking place, but no word
has been used to describe it in the preschool context. Lena, an in-service teacher described how she felt using the word in her practice:

I think it's perfect. I think it will uplift our status- our role as a preschool teacher. But I also think it's quite a new word so, we got it when we were still in [university] so when we got out to reality and used undervisning many of the older teachers were a bit “no we don't do that in a preschool.” But we had a lot of professional development in the word undervisning...because undervisning, if you just say it you think about school and you have a teacher in the front of the class they are standing there, and they are going to give you all the lessons and say to you what you are going to learn. And that to the preschool, that is very strange...we work through play and we work through activity and things like that. So, the thing I think, the preschool has to do is make the word their own... in school they have undervisning but they do it in another way (Lena, 18 April, 2018).

Despite their feelings on the concept undervisning, the goal-directed definition of undervisning in the school law seems to be understood by these teachers as goal-rational teaching (Lind, 2010). Goal-rational teaching structures knowledge as needing to be imparted into the children, where tasks inform questions and answers in a calculated way; teachers control and correct children’s learning to arrive on the right knowledge path (Lind, 2010). It was evident in the teachers’ narratives that they feel the children are catalysts when it comes to their own learning, and teachers’ undervisning. We can see this in examples from the narratives below, where the teachers made it clear that they could not have planned for the meaningful evolution of activities without new questions and hypotheses that arose from the children’s own ideas. If the goal-directed definition of teaching is interpreted goal-relationally (Lind, 2010), teaching allows for dynamic knowledge creation that elicits new “twists and turns” (p. 359, translated) driven by shared communication and shared experiences, involving both teacher and child. A goal-rational practice risks affording children to exist as knowledge creators, their agency would not take precedence (Dahlberg, et al., 2007; Edwards, Gandini, & Foreman, 1998). Without children’s input activities cease to be meaningful and as Eva said “[the children] will leave you” (Eva, in-service, 25 April, 2018).

5.2 Undervisning in the Classroom: Planned and spontaneous interactions

During the interviews teachers were asked to describe a time in the last month where they witnessed undervisning in their classroom; during analysis, these narratives were used to comprehend the teachers’ conceptions of undervisning. Examples of undervisning consisted of both spontaneous moments and planned activities or projects. The interactions with children that the teachers described were all structured in a goal-relational way. Spontaneous undervisning was described during transition times like getting the children dressed, free play, for example walking in the woods discussing acorns, or in the atelier unscrewing a cap on a paint marker. Planned
undervisning incorporated long-term activities and/or themes, the preschool environment, various materials, and specific curriculum goals. However, grounding planned activities in and around interactions that had occurred during transition times or free play was always emphasized by the teachers. Below is an excerpt from an in-service teacher named Sara:

Yeah because situations arise all the time. Like even when you’re in the hall and they put on the clothes. It’s tricky for children to pull up the zip on their jackets and that’s also a teaching technique. And there’s so many little things every day that if you have the knowledge of all the subjects, then you have opportunities. Even when you eat together and divide the fruit or- and all the different situations that arise you can use some knowledge that you have as a teacher. (Sara, 4 April, 2018)

Billie, a pre-service teacher, re-organized one of the classrooms in a preschool to fulfill her VFU assignment. To incorporate free play interactions into a long-term planned undervisning activity, she felt the most important first step was to consult the children individually and let them vote to decide the function and name of the room. For Billie, giving the children a voice was crucial in planning this activity, as considering the children’s influence is “an important thing that we don’t see a lot… the children don’t have so much influence- they’re involved but it’s not on their terms” (Billie, 4 April, 2018a). The group decided the new room would be called “The Disco Room,” a space for dancing and listening to music. According to Billie, this activity provided many opportunities for teachers and children to strive for curriculum goals. Dancing provided opportunities for mathematics and health, the music prompted discussions about language, multiculturalism, and values. Technology was incorporated through Quick Response (QR) codes placed around the room where children could use tablets to scan codes and play different songs. Even at the start of the remodel, Billie engaged the children in a discussion about voting and democracy, and the importance of respecting each other’s opinions. Billie not only organized the activity in a way that strengthened her undervisning through many curriculum goals, but because she organized the room to continuously engage the children, the effects from her remodel were potentially long lasting. Being a teacher comes with a lot of responsibility and “it’s important for us to not, how do you say, not manipulate -- not take advantage of it… So, I could just easily go in and say okay this room needs to be like this and that it would be easy, but as I said, because of my knowledge because of what I studied, and my experiences… that’s why it worked” (Billie, 4 April, 2018a).

Considering the children’s agency actively informs the rest of the teachers’ practice. In the examples below, the overall planned theme of the preschool prompted research questions from individual children, and informed both a moment of spontaneous undervisning and expanded to
more long-term planned undervisning that could be shared with the whole group. The environment and interactions between the teachers and the children were also a critical component of the teachers’ narratives. Dewey (1980) stressed the importance of a shared purpose and creating a classroom environment that is meaningful for both teachers and children if teaching is to lead to children’s learning. Children must also embed themselves in a rich environment that encourages communication; learning should be grasped through the participation and engagement with others; new meaning lies between social interactions (Dewey, 1980).

For Dewey, communication as participation means that teaching does not happen directly by inputting knowledge into the mind of a child. It can only happen indirectly, through children and teachers defining and taking part in an activity that is captivating for them both. In this way, it is the environment, seen as social situations, that indirectly educates; and only through participation can the effects of teaching be felt, and learning take place.

Jasmine, a pre-service teacher, was working with the theme of sharks in her preschool. A young boy approached her and asked if sharks have a tongue, her first reaction was “of course,” but after initial reflection she realized she did not know the definite answer. Jasmine and the boy researched the question together, and as more questions arose they delved deeper into their search for knowledge. It was rewarding for them both, they learned that yes, sharks have tongues, but also the process of finding that knowledge and sharing it, was equally impactful. Later, when the whole class was gathered, the boy had the opportunity to share his new knowledge with his friends, “that moment was so - oh my God, it was nice, I think that we have to capture those moments with the children” (Jasmine, 5 April, 2018).

When discussing planned undervisning versus spontaneous undervisning, Lena, an in-service teacher, differentiated between the two by who is steering. She described planned undervisning as originating with the children’s interest in mind; however, it is initiated and steered by the teacher. Documentation, discussion, and reflection are important elements in the process of planned undervisning, and most importantly to Lena, giving the documentation back to the children to reflect and react together, is a crucial part of undervisning.

In the case of spontaneous undervisning, the children take more of an initiating and steering role. In Lena’s example, a young girl was standing at the sink, the girl began to follow the pipes visible on the wall. She asked Lena questions and together they hypothesized about where the pipe went through the building and where the water travelled outside of the school. Later, Lena went back with the girl and took photos and wrote about their experience and their questions together, and they brought this documentation to the whole class. Together they had all been
engaging in the long-term project theme of water, and as a group, their pipe discussion continued.

5.3 Leontiev’s Activity and Action: Intentional undervisning

Leontiev’s hierarchy of activity, action, and operation were applied to teachers’ narratives to theorize a new working definition of preschool teaching. As a collective activity undertaken by a preschool, undervisning may be thought of in many ways. Broadly, the motive and the object are to teach to stipulations in the school law and curriculum, but each individual teacher may also hold individual motives and objectives that may or may not align with steering documents.

When considering a planned activity in her classroom, Eva played out this situation with her colleagues. Eva argued against their desire to break down the curriculum goals surrounding the use of prepositions into more manageable straightforward goals, to see clearly if the children had any changed knowledge. Breaking down the goals would not provide the children with opportunities to understand and comprehend the new knowledge contextually in their own way. Additionally, organizing undervisning this way would admittedly miss many opportunities for documenting any changed knowledge that does occur. In Eva’s example, Kalle, a child, was watching his teacher demonstrate farm animals on, behind, over, etc. At the end of the activity Kalle walked away with the main realization that the animal the teacher was holding was a pig, and not a horse, for example.

…In that observation Kalle doesn’t have any changed knowledge, we have to find another way to teach Kalle about this. And then Kalle leaves and he is playing pig because he is so happy he found out what a pig is. And he is playing that his pig is over, under, behind; but you stopped your observation, so you don’t know. And that’s - sometimes if you break the goals down into too small pieces you will miss so many. It’s not only about teaching. That moment, it’s about life. And that kids sometimes need to sleep a little bit before he gets it. And you don’t know, he learned something, not what you wanted him to, but he learned. (Eva, 25 April, 2018)

The orchestration and intentions behind the different examples of undervisning can be thought of as actions, the teacher’s actions. Knowing what kind of undervisning is appropriate comes down to understanding a teacher’s intention. In the example above, Eva puts forth a situation that could arise from thinking too linearly about teaching in preschool and children’s potential for learning. Holding too closely to teacher identified learning objects risks observing children’s changed knowledge when it arises organically in play, and over time; the documentation and subsequent inspections may also lack this evidence, making it seem like teachers are unable to undervisa and strive for curriculum goals. Eva emphasized her intentions would provide an accommodating
space for children to be able to contextually learn new knowledge. Her intentions support the idea that children’s nature and play already hold the potential to meet curriculum goals. Their interests should not need to be molded to fit around those goals.

5.4 Leontiev’s Operation: A Teacher’s role in Undervisning

The intention and skill that Eva and the other teachers discussed, they credit to their university education. The school law (SFS, 2010: 800) states that only a person who obtains the university degree and licensure as a teacher or preschool teacher may undertake undervisning. Preschool practice has always encompassed teaching teams, where university educated teachers partner with teaching assistants who either have a post-secondary certification in preschool teaching, or substitutes who do not have any formal education in preschool (referred to in Swedish as barnskötare or rikarie, respectively). Discussion of this school law statement prompted a heavy dose of introspection from the teachers. Who can, and should, teach in preschool?

Lena says her credibility stems from her awareness and approach. The university education and the theoretical knowledge she gained there has given her invaluable knowledge about her role in undervisning. As a teacher she has acted as an observer, participant, driver, and facilitator in children’s play, but, she believes anyone can occupy these roles. The big question of why, as a teacher, “why am I doing what I am doing, and why we are standing back and just watching, or why we are going into the activity…” (Lena, 18 April, 2018), conveys an awareness that elevates children’s preschool activities to strive for curriculum goals in a way, as Lena argues, would not be met if a teaching assistant were placed in the same situation. Lena’s thought process here provides some clarity to the question of who can teach. This does not mean that teaching assistants are not able to teach, that they lack the ability, or that they are not allowed. Instead, it is that they may not be able to provide the kind of pedagogical intentionality and reasoning behind each interaction with children that teachers gain from a university education.

The operation level of undervisning can come down to this: Preschool teaching assistants have an internalized way of teaching that has been developed through their own histories and experiences, but they have not critically examined their practice because they lack the theoretical and practical tools to do so. Additionally, with undervisning under the charge of licensed teachers, there may not be any motivation for reflection. This is not to say that licensed teachers do not act operationally, or that operational undervisning does not have a place in preschool. These habituated behaviors are the result of familiarization, they are a natural progression of mastering skills. Nevertheless, introducing methods of working like the defined roles of undervisning may place preschool staff into more of a technician role, incentivizing objectivity (Moss, 2006). As technicians, preschool staff aim for measurable outcomes through a pre-specified objective.
process (Dahlberg, et al., 2007; Moss, 2006). To offset this, educated and licensed teachers may have more tools to reflect and reevaluate their practice to avoid counterproductive habituated behaviors. Leaving actions unevaluated and unchanged will perpetuate a stagnant practice of undervisning. As Dewey states, it is when an action becomes “cast in a mold and runs in a routine way does it lose its educative power” (Dewey, 1980, p. 9).

6 Undervisning For Swedish Preschool

Leontiev’s hierarchy of activity action and operation reveals how undervisning could be understood in multiple ways, especially in preschool where play, exploration, learning and teaching are deeply intertwined with children’s agency and teachers’ goals. Undervisning can emerge in any place or situation throughout the preschool day, and the way teachers approach these occasions with holistic intention, behind a self-reflected practice, allows for the nature of preschool to come forth, along-side curricular goals, this is the fundamental outcome of this study. This understanding also assumes an evolutionary nature of undervisning that can be comprehended differently depending on what stage in the action/operation evolution and for/by whom the undervisning action is taking place.

This study supports the general notion that preschool teaching is complex and multifaceted (Hedefalk, et al., 2015; Helenius et al., 2016; Jonsson, et al., 2017; Skolverket, 2017, 2018; Westman & Bergmark, 2013), it also presents the philosophy that teaching does not lead directly to children’s learning (Nilsson et al., in press). However, when seen through activity, action and operation, the inclusivity that is embedded into Swedish preschool remains and undervisning holds the most potential to empower children to endure as knowledge creators and gain a life-long desire to learn. The activity of undervisning is broad. It can encompass many situations, but considering the nature of preschool and the variety of ways teachers and children can interact and learn together, undervisning should rightly remain unbounded in this way. The first paragraph of the curriculum states democracy is the foundation of preschool, and all children’s development and learning should be promoted (Skolverket, 2011). In a place that values diversity as much as Swedish preschool does, a more inclusive definition should be adopted as a means of developing a more inclusive practice.

6.1 Contradictions Between Policy and Practice: Dilemmas, Disturbances, and Innovations

In the interviews, the teachers expressed they did not believe their practice should change with the formal adoption of undervisning in preschool; and with their goal-rational understanding of the school law goal-directed definition, doing so would dismantle the holistic principles of Swedish
preschool. If the new curriculum includes *undervisning* as the drafts show, (Skolverket, 2017), there is potential for expansion of the practice of preschool (Engeström, 2001; Engestöm & Sannino, 2010), and therefore preschool’s *undervisning*. The contradictions between policy and practice that became evident through interview discussions, highlighted the need to redefine preschool teaching. The inclusion of preschool into the goal-directed definition of teaching created a new, reorganized activity, which generated contradictions, and as a result can manifest disturbances, dilemmas, and innovations. (Engeström & Sannino, 2010). Considering the preschool teachers’ motives, objects and actions relationally in CHAT shaped an understanding of preschool teaching that aligns closer with the teachers’ conceptions of their own practice than the current school law definition. Contradictions between policy and practice must be brought to light, illuminating the outcomes between the activity systems leading to the dilemmas, disturbances, and/or innovations. This reveals expansion through the historical and cultural development within the systems (Engestöm & Sannino, 2010).

If teachers receive the new curriculum and accept the word *undervisning* into their practice as something they already do, there is no change, which leads to a stagnant practice. This contradiction between policy intention and preschool practice creates a dilemma for policy makers, the intention when the school law was changed to include *undervisning* was not to simply adopt a new word into the old practice. Conversely, receiving the new curriculum and interpreting the current goal-directed definition of *undervisning* as goal-rational (Lind, 2010) may result in a narrow practice of preschool immersed in academic and cognitive goals (Bennett, 2005; Moss, 2006). This contradiction creates a cultural and historical disturbance, the teachers in the interviews fear of goal-rational teaching in preschool may come to fruition, and children’s agency, a defining historic priority for the teachers, may not be emphasized. Finally, innovation may be manifested if teachers receive the new curriculum with the intent to continuously develop and explore *undervisning* as it is manifested in preschool, a goal-relational interpretation of the school law (Lind, 2010; Nilsson et al., in press). *Undervisning* can be creatively adopted and adapted into a new kind of expanded practice. A goal-relational interpretation creates expansion as new objects are innovated in activity systems, and successful expansion leads to “qualitative transformation of all components of the activity system” (Engeström & Sannino, 2010, p. 8). Adopting *undervisning* for preschool fosters the possibility for expansion. Practice can be changed in a way that strives for the curriculum goals, satisfying policy changes. Care and the holistic values remain a strong component of preschool, satisfying teachers. And with an intentional and inclusive practice from innovations, evolution and expansion can elevate all components of preschool.
6.2 Awareness in Practice: Learning objects and play

Teachers in this study displayed an air of confidence in their approach to balance goal-directed teaching with curriculum goals while prioritizing children’s agency; this contrasts with research observations that teachers are unaware of how to appropriately balance these demands (Björklund, 2014; Cremin, Glauert, Craft, Compton, & Stylianidou, 2015; Nilsson, Ferholt, & Lecusay, 2017; Siraj Blatchford, 2010; Skjaeveland, 2017; Skolinspektionen, 2016, 2018). In the narratives the teachers’ creativity and confidence to intuitively interlace curriculum goals with interests of the children also confirmed their skillful balanced practice. There was no direct learning object built into the design of activities, instead the teachers elevated children’s contextual play to strive for curriculum goals. The space and time teachers provided for children to engage in exploration during free play allowed teachers to know how to engage the children in spontaneous and planned undervising. Billie went into detail of the importance of free play time in preschool. During play, the teacher has an opportunity to get to know each child, their needs, interests, and where they are in their development. She argues, it is only because she was given the chance to be with the children during free play that she was able to craft meaningful activities that challenged the children’s current knowledge.

If teachers take the time to be with children during play, they can notice changed knowledge, two teachers even described this “ah ha moment” (Eva, 28 April, 2018, Jasmine, 4 April, 2018), which can often be missed if it is not evident in the time immediately surrounding planned activities. The reshaping and structuring of preschool activities between planned teaching activities and play creates these moments of learning for the children, and realization for the teachers. Undervising is a long process that extends through the many years children are in preschool; therefore, the curriculum goals should also be considered in this way.

Still, considering preschool teaching in such broad terms poses a danger that teachers seeking to take advantage of every moment for instruction will take away from the natural interactions that make preschool an enjoyable place (Jonsson et al., 2017). While exploiting every moment to impart knowledge may not lead to learning, neither is pivoting children’s learning around set times for teaching and teacher identified and prioritized learning objects. The teachers in the interviews grappled with this feeling of “killing the moment”, but they reassured their efforts and interactions with children by affirming that knowing when to intervene (without interrupting) is a fundamental part of being a teacher (Helenius et al., 2016).

Ljung-Djärf et al. (2014) has observed teachers experiencing an increased awareness of preschool learning when predetermined learning objects were systematically planned and taught in a structured way. There was still an emphasis on play, but when the teachers wanted the
“children to discover and experience something in particular” (Ljung-Djärf et al., 2014, p. 28), their approach must systematic. While the teachers in this study also spoke of their increased awareness, they related it to their own practice and not on the children’s learning. The teachers did not feel they needed to steer and weave structured goals into the fabric of preschool. Their awareness and approach from their university education allowed for creative structuring of curriculum goals into both spontaneous interactions and planned activities. They saw potential for children to gain new knowledge without needing to direct them to specific learning objects.

The teachers’ narratives also made it was clear their undervisning is not a straight path between teaching and children’s learning. Instead their approach is long-term and non-linear, more rhizomatic (Moss, 2006). The concept of a rhizome in education is taken from plant root systems that spread in unpredictable and different directions, therefore there is no linear progression. This concept is often associated with Swedish preschool and can be found in support material detailing preschool guidelines (Skolverket, 2012). With a rhizomatic notion, planned teaching activities are born of spontaneous undervisning, and vice versa. Just as Lena and Jasmine engaged with children’s questions that arose out of a larger planned theme, and spontaneously prompted new knowledge creation for the child, teacher, and the entire preschool class. This subsequently translated into more planned activities and exploration. Providing a space for exploration that promoted collaborative engagement between teachers and children elevated undervisning in ways that the teachers could not have planned for. Cognitive and holistic curriculum goals still have the potential to be met, but in a contextual and meaningful way for both teachers and children (Nilsson et al., 2017; in press).

The pedagogical focus for the teachers in the interviews aligned well with Bennett’s (2005) advisement of balancing broad developmental goals with academic goals. While the teachers felt children’s agency in spontaneous and planned interactions was the most important teaching organization element, they also seemed to approach learning goals with flexibility and ease. Interpreting the school law goal-directed definition as goal-rational, and even emphasizing teacher identified learning objects, elicits pedagogical intentions that contradict the teachers’ education experience, personal preference, and current pedagogical practice. Considering a long-term, holistic, play based preschool environment is a more fitting niche for these preschool teachers, and one that endures the historical nature of preschool, while still striving for the more recent curriculum goals.

6.3 Limitations
Using a CHAT framework to interpret how preschool teachers’ think about and implement their ideas of teaching has provided valuable data that highlights the many intricacies of the
relationship between steering documents and Swedish preschool. However, including preschool support staff and administrators, as well as parents and children, in future interview, ethnographic, and/or observation research would provide a more complete view of interactions and mediators in the activity system. There is a lot of potential for further development with the concepts and ideas developed in this study, when applied on a larger scale the subjective and relational nature of Swedish preschool can be better understood and long-term change in human learning and development can be explored.

7 Conclusion: An inclusive preschool discourse

Swedish preschool has always been a collaborative environment that values democracy and diversity; accordingly, undervisning should also encompass these fundamental principles. If these preschool qualities go ignored and undervisning in preschool remains undefined, the lack of equity and consistency that has been present as of late (Skolinspektionen, 2017, 2018) will likely continue.

The interviews shed some light on how teachers are conceptualizing the dichotomies in policy and practice, and what it means to undertake undervisning in preschool. In their practice, teachers are striving to meet curriculum goals, and the school law dictates teaching, or undervisning is now the responsibility of preschool teachers (SFS, 2010: 800); however, the teachers’ goal-rational understanding is not replicable in preschool where children’s agency demands precedence and the formal transmission model of teaching would prove impractical. The teachers recommended that the first step toward adopting undervisning into the practice of preschool is adapting the word to fit their profession. Examining the teachers’ narratives from a CHAT perspective, allowed for understanding each teacher’s actions as the product of the collective motive and individual goals that influence and shape the unique activity of preschool (Cole, 1996; Leontiev, 1977). When preschool it seen as an environment, it is set up to display what teachers, the curriculum, and the community determine is important based on cultural and political priorities and histories (Dewey, 1980). However, it should also be determined by the children, their interests, and their potential; making preschool a true culturally and historically influenced environment.

Teachers in the interviews balanced both general and prioritized curriculum goals with children’s initiatives. This is evident in their stories detailed in this study, as well as their confidence conveyed in the interviews. The teachers met their teaching mission in the school law not with anxiety and evasion, but instead with creativity. The interests and agency of the children was never compromised in the teacher’s practice, they have an innovative understanding and
approach to their profession. And while undervisning was not always clear for them, they were confident their own practice encompasses undervisning in ways that satisfy steering document recommendations.

Undervisning in preschool must sustain a discourse that considers children as active and competent in their own learning, and as co-constructors of knowledge alongside their teachers; a more goal-relational than goal-rational understanding of the school law definition. Some teachers mentioned this distinction needs to be clarified by policy. To diminish the risks of dilemmas, disturbances, and misinterpretations of goal-directed undervisning, the new definition of undervisning that belongs to Swedish should be considered.

The intended 2018 release of the updated curriculum may have significant pedagogical effects, it is unclear whether the document will include undervisning or redefine the concept for preschool. However, conducting further research that critically examines how undervisning is adopted more formally in practice and documentation, would expand on effects felt by the preschool practice and profession. Further exploring the activity level of contradiction within and between preschool and policy activity systems, can expose the roots of conflicts between policy and practice. Questioning, analyzing, modeling, implementing, and reflecting can create a cycle of expansion (Engestöm & Sannino, 2010) that continues to cultivate a Swedish preschool that values the perspectives of children, social and cognitive development, and promotes life-long learning. Preschool should remain a place that values diversity and equality, and clarifying teaching in preschool as undervisning for Swedish preschool instills a diverse and inclusive spirit that is quintessentially Sweden.

8 Reference List


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## 9 Appendix

Below is the original interview guide referenced during the one-on-one interviews with pre-service and in-service teachers. However, because of the subjective nature of interviews, questions may have been rephrased and discussed out of order.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions (explicit and implicit)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher’s Background</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. In service or pre-service teacher?</td>
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<tr>
<td>a. Graduation date?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. School they work at, or attended during their recent VFU?</td>
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<tr>
<td>indirect/followup: any particular pedagogical philosophy at the school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What age of children have you worked with?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Teaching</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. What do you think of using the word “Teaching” in your practice?</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Can you describe a time during the last month that you have witnessed/seen teaching occur in your classroom?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. did you plan this activity? What did you consider when planning?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
8. What do you think about using the term “teaching” (Undervisning?) in the curriculum?  
a. Will this change your practice? Any adaptations?

9. Do you believe your profession is in a time of change/development?  
a. Important preschool traditions that should continue to be present in preschool? Traditions that can be forgotten?

10. Are there ways “teaching” can influence the teaching-team dynamic in preschools?  
a. Specifically the inclusion of the word teaching in the curriculum? Given what the school law defines as who can teach

11. How does spontaneous teaching impact the children?

12. How does planned teaching impact the children?

**Theoretical Knowledge**

12. **Curriculum** (When considering teaching young children) Do you keep the curriculum close at hand when you are working?  
a. How do you consider the curriculum goals?  
b. Do you feel your class reaches the curriculum goals?

13. What elements of the preschool community/environment have an effect on teaching?  
a. Direct: Orienting teaching: Do you as a teacher feel the need to change the flow of the class to better fit with curriculum goals?

14. Has your school (university name) changed your opinion or views on preschool practice?

Questions for recent graduates

15. Since graduation, have your expectations of working in the profession of preschool changed?