Working with Students with Special Needs in Forest Pedagogy

Pedagogues’ Practices in *i Ur och Skur* preschools in Sweden

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ABSTRACT

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The aim of the study is to gain insight into Swedish preschool pedagogues’ conceptualization who work with a special outdoor learning concept, of including children with special needs within their groups. Sweden is a country which is famous for its “education for all” policy, however there is a little to know about the presence of children with special needs in the preschool setting. Children with special needs often risk being isolated as a result of limitations in the number of activities available for them in school. Although various studies examined both the effect of time spent outdoors, both inclusion’s positive effect on children with special needs. Interviews were conducted with four preschool pedagogues who work in the *i Ur och Skur* preschool, the outdoor education approach popular in Scandinavia. Sociocultural theory was applied as a conceptual framework for analysis of the interview transcripts. The pedagogues demonstrated to support inclusion of children with special needs in preschool activities. The pedagogues showed more willingness to include children with cognitive impairment or neurodevelopmental disorders, than with physical disabilities. Among their concerns, issues of safety, weather and the outdoor activities potential for highlighting differences in skills and abilities (mostly physical) were mentioned. In order to adapt the settings and practices to be more inclusive for children with special needs, pedagogues proposed including extra personnel to provide assistance.

Key words: outdoor education, outdoor learning, forest pedagogy, preschool, early childhood education and care, special needs, inclusion, disability, “i Ur och Skur”
# Table of Contents:

ABSTRACT .......................................................................................................................... 1

1 Introduction .................................................................................................................. 1

2 Background .................................................................................................................. 2

2.1 Integration and Inclusion ....................................................................................... 2

2.1.1 Inclusion in Sweden ......................................................................................... 2

2.2 Outdoor Education and Learning .......................................................................... 3

2.2.1 Early Years Outdoor Education in Sweden ..................................................... 4

2.2.2 Forest Schools in Sweden, the i Ur och Skur approach ................................. 5

2.3 Previous research on the impacts of time spent outdoors and outdoor learning ...... 6

2.4 Previous research on inclusion among outdoor settings .................................. 7

2.5 Theoretical Framework ......................................................................................... 8

3 Research Aims/Questions ......................................................................................... 10

3.1 Research Aims ....................................................................................................... 10

3.2 Research questions ............................................................................................... 10

4 Methods .................................................................................................................... 11

4.1 Setting & Participants ......................................................................................... 11

4.2 Documentation Methods ..................................................................................... 12

4.3 Analysis Methods ................................................................................................. 13

4.4 Ethical Considerations & Recruitment of participants ........................................ 13

5 Findings & Discussion .............................................................................................. 14

5.1 The view of special needs children in the i Ur och Skur Preschools .................... 14

5.1.1 Special Needs Children’s presence in the i Ur och Skur Preschools ............... 14

5.1.2 The way parents choose preschool .................................................................. 16

5.1.3 General benefits of outdoors, according to the pedagogues ........................... 17

5.1.4 Inclusion and acceptance - “They learned his issues, like he learned theirs” .... 19

5.2 Involving children with special needs in the i Ur och Skur preschools ............... 20
5.2.1 Involving children with physical disability ........................................... 20
5.2.2 Involving children with neurodevelopmental disorders or cognitive impairment 22

6 Conclusion ............................................................................................................. 25

7 References ............................................................................................................ 27

Appendices .............................................................................................................. 34
  Appendix A- Interview Guide .................................................................................. 34
  Appendix B- Letter to preschools/directors asking for participation ....................... 36
  Appendix C- Letter to preschool pedagogues asking for participation ..................... 37
  Appendix D- Consent form ...................................................................................... 38
1 Introduction

Sweden is one of the few countries where educational policy and practices are designed to promote social inclusion (EADSNE, 2003). Preschools are required to be equally accessible for every child from age one to six since the development of the “education for all” policy (Haug, 1998; Nilholm, 2003). Disability policy in Sweden ensures students regardless of impairment or development level be offered education in the local school, together with their peers (SOU 1974:53) and educational methods and environments should adapt to the needs of students (DePauw and Doll-Tepper, 2000; Vickerman, 2012).

Outdoor activities have a long tradition in Swedish Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) (Engdahl and Årlemalm-Hagsér, 2013). This tradition is reflected in Swedish cultural values such as “friluftsliv” (their experiential connection to nature), and “Allemansrätten” (the right for a person to walk anywhere on the land). It is also reflected in the Swedish Preschool Curriculum which promotes children’s participation in outdoor activities (Skolverket, 2010). The i Ur och Skur or “Rain or Shine” (Joyce, 2006) pedagogy, is a particularly illustrative example of the intersection of Swedish values related to education and the outdoors, as it is an approach, similar to forest schools (Knight, 2009), that seeks to maximize children’s time spent outdoors.

The aim of this paper is to contribute new empirical evidence to the field of inclusion in outdoor preschool education of children with special needs. The idea of taking children into outdoors has become favoured in the last decades around the world. Brannan (2003) argues that children and youth with special needs are often deprived of opportunities to engage in outdoor activities, thus it is important to examine if and how these opportunities can be increased in Sweden. Brodin and Lindstrand (2006) describe the potential of time spent outdoors to promote learning and social inclusion for children with special needs; however, there are few research studies examining issues of children with special needs in Swedish preschools in relation to outdoor learning. Further, highlighting the need to conduct research into this area is the fact that until 2013 statics on children with special needs were not gathered in Sweden (Hjörne, 2016).

The positive effects on children in early childhood of time spent outdoors are challenging to study in Sweden given that the majority of preschools promote outdoor activities, making comparative studies difficult to conduct. In the present study, this challenge is addressed by investigating preschools practicing the i Uroch Skur approach. As preschools that promote spending time outdoors for the majority if not all of the day, these preschools provide
a useful comparison case for examining the educational and social inclusion implications of participation in outdoor activities.

2 Background

The background research of the current study had three aims. First to get a deeper understanding on inclusion and its occurrence in Swedish preschools. Second, to explore research connected to outdoor learning and education, forest schools, *Uroch Skur* concept and the impact of time spent outdoor on children. The third aim was to find previous research that present appearance, methods and practices of inclusion connected to outdoors and special needs/disability.

2.1 Integration and Inclusion

For understanding the current situation in Swedish preschools towards inclusion, it is important first to understand the movement’s origin, and its development in Sweden. In the realm of education, the ratification of the Salamanca Declaration (UNESCO, 1994) introduced the ideal of creating inclusive educational systems internationally in which all children, including those with special needs, could participate in mainstream classrooms. Placing a disabled child into a classroom physically does not mean integration in their eyes, more they believe in acceptance and seeing them natural part of the class. Preschool inclusion has positive developmental and behavioral outcomes for children with and without disabilities (Odom, 2000).

2.1.1 Inclusion in Sweden

It is essential to understand the current policies and practices of Sweden towards inclusion, for knowing about the pedagogues’ opinion, usage of terminology and attitude. Preschool inclusion means active participation of young children with and without special needs in the same classroom. The objective of preschool inclusion is to promote social justice and to develop a welcoming society (Booth and Ainscow, 2002). Brodin and Lindstrand’s (2006) report on children’s inclusion in outdoor educational activities notes that Sweden promotes inclusion, but the execution of these policies is questionable. For example, there is recent evidence in Sweden that a significant number of children have been labelled as having special educational needs, and placed in segregated settings (Haug, as cited in Hjörne, 2016). Children are placed into special classes if they have dyslexia, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Autism Spectrum Disorder, or intellectual disabilities (Hjörne, 2016; Ljusberg, A.L, 2005).
Until 2013, no categorization system or statics were developed for accounting for children with special education needs (Hjörne, 2016).

The question of which children receive special support in preschools is not much explored (Sandberg et al., 2010). Children with special needs in most cases attend regular preschool units in Sweden which may have resources. Sandberg et al. (2010) note, that the term “children in need of special support” were used instead of “children with special needs’. Furthermore, in Sweden the type of organization and the educational setting which should provide support for children is not regulated nor specified nationally, consequently the decision making and a lot of the accessible resources are depending on the municipalities understanding (Lundqvist, Westling Allodi and Siljehag, 2016). No data exists which systematically measures the inclusiveness of preschools, therefore there is a lack of knowledge about the characteristics of preschool education and care that are provided to children with special educational needs in Sweden (Lundqvist et al., 2016). Lillvist and Granlund (2009) show that preschool teachers reported that most of children in need of special support were undiagnosed children, and where labelled as such because they had difficulties functioning in the preschool context.

2.2 Outdoor Education and Learning

Outdoor education, as a concept and practice has been around for decades, however the definitions of it varies. According to Gair, the definition is: “any educational activity in the open air and in urban areas can thus be regarded as outdoor education” (as cited in Brodin and Lindstrand, 2006, pp. 32)

Later, the definition of the term was expanded to reflect the interaction between individual and nature: “Method of teaching and learning that emphasizes direct, multisensory experiences; takes place in the outdoor environment; and uses an integrated approach to learning by involving the natural, community, and individual environments” (Gilbertson, Bates, McLaughlin and Ewert, 2006, p. 5). The latter definition was adopted for the present study.

The idea of taking children outdoors from formal classrooms has become favoured in the last decades internationally. Concepts and practices of outdoor education may vary cross-culturally given differences among cultures with respect to values and beliefs related to nature (Bentsen, Mygind and Randrup; Bentsen and Sondergaard Jensen. as cited in Fägerstam, 2012). The Learning outside the classroom manifesto (2006) was created in England and claimed, that every child should have the possibility to experience life and learning in an outdoor environment. (DfES, 2006). In Scotland an outdoor promoting educational program was established, where the Minister wanted to involve environments such as farms, parks, zoos,
woodlands, rivers, mountains, coastline, and gardens to the learning process (Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2007). In the United Kingdom there are a growing number of so called “forest schools” which were started in the 1990’s and were based on the Scandinavian belief that children should have close contact to nature. They believe in that forest education provides hands-on learning experience in a natural environment that cannot be experienced elsewhere (O’Brien and Murray, 2006, p. 4,7).

Outdoor education settings vary in terms of their geographical location, goals, and resources. It can happen in woods, in an ideal forest site among plants, trees and branches (Knight, 2009, pg. 72), forest gardens where garden education and woodland experiences are merged (Almers, Askerlund and Kjellström, 2017), and finally, in some countries (e.g. Iceland) coastlines with the advantages of exploring sand, waves, sea life (Wilkinson, 2013).

In Sweden, interest in outdoor education is on the rise. For example, the National Centre for Outdoor Environmental Education (NCU), Linköping University proposed a definition to describe outdoor education in the Swedish context: “Outdoor education is an approach to provide learning in interplay between experience and reflection based on concrete experience in authentic situations” (NCU, 2004). Furthermore, in teacher education programs throughout Sweden there has been an increase in outdoor education courses (Ånggård, 2010).

2.2.1 Early Years Outdoor Education in Sweden

In both their culture generally, and in educational practices specifically, Nordic countries have an interest in the outdoors and outdoor activities. The educational philosophies of Jean Jacques Rousseau and Friedrich Fröbel are evident in Swedish educational and cultural philosophy. The former promoted bringing up children in nature for avoiding the damaging influences of society, while the latter believed in teaching children to love nature from the early years. Fröbel claimed, that children’s knowledge about nature should be based on experiences and observations and he put the teachers (as gardeners) responsible for helping children (plants) to awaken feelings toward nature in the preschool which he called kindergarten (Ånggård, 2010).

The Swedish emphasis on children and nature belonging together (Gullestad, 1997) is reflected in Swedish preschool provision. For example, on winter days Swedish children spend 2 hours, spring/autumn 3.6 hours, and on a summer day, children spend 5.8 hours outside on an average, in Stockholm (Söderström, Mårtensson, Grahn and Blennow as cited in Ånggård, 2010). In the Swedish Preschool Curriculum, time spent outdoors together with a focus on the appreciation of nature are emphasized in particular: „The preschool should put great emphasis
on issues concerning the environment and nature conservation...The preschool should contribute to ensuring children acquire a caring attitude to nature and the environment, and understand that they are a part of nature’s recycling process” (Skolverket, 2010 p. 7).

2.2.2 Forest Schools in Sweden, the *i Ur och Skur* approach

The pioneer of the *i Ur och Skur* approach was Siw Linde who opened the first ‘forest school’ in 1985. Firstly, she became involved in a “Skogsmulleskola” movement which was based on Gösta Frohm’s concept, connecting learning about nature with the cheerful character “Mulle”. After the success of the concept Linde opened the first *i Ur och Skur* preschool which referred to spend time outdoors in “Rain or Shine” and included six children and several principles of the work:

- “The pedagogical approach is that children’s need of knowledge, activities and togetherness is fulfilled by being in nature.
- Children learn how to be in nature and how to protect it. This is achieved by having fun together in the forest, fields, mountains and on lakes in all kinds of weather, all year round.
- Cooperation with children’s parents maintains quality outdoor activities.
- Nature is not indestructible. Improving knowledge about nature and understanding the interrelationships in this can change people’s attitudes.” (Robertson, 2008, p.5)

Nature, from this perspective was seen as beneficial for children’s social and physical development. The importance of feeling togetherness, and exposure to a variety of sensory stimuli was stressed (Robertson, 2008).

Since the intention of the current research is examining the phenomena of inclusion, the possibilities and impacts of outdoors on children with or without special needs for getting the most separable view on the outdoors effect, the *i Ur och Skur* preschools were chosen, since according to Sara Knight (2009) *i Ur och Skur* concept is the most similar institution what she understands under “forest school”.
2.3 Previous research on the impacts of time spent outdoors and outdoor learning

Researchers promote participation in outdoor activities which provide children with sustained sensory stimulation, and help to develop motor skills and gaining coordination and balance (Fjørtoft 1999, as cited in Fjørtoft, 2001; Grahn et. al, cited in Davis, 2009). The forest is an arena where children can acquire skills in exploration. For example, forests offer a physically diverse and everchanging setting that can produce challenging natural affordances that help to maintain children’s interest (Lerstrup, 2016) and develop their novelty-detection abilities (Jones, 2000).

Besides these, time spent outdoor has impacts on cognitive, affective, social and behavioral processes (Dillon et al., 2005). While being outside, children use more varieties of playforms. (Fjørtoft, 2001), mechanisms of resilience and coping with stress can be developed. Nature with its not predefined formations offer more challenges than indoor environments and by taking more risks, children become more competent and self-confident (Wells and Evans, 2003). Furthermore, participation in outdoor activities promotes relationship building and feeling the sense of community (Knight, 2009). In outdoor play children learn to cooperate with peers, make friends, and their communication skills evolve.

Brodin and Lindstrand (2006) investigated children’s play and learning in outdoor environments and found that outdoor play areas provide possibilities to explore the environment according to the actual level of children’s development. Activities which happen outdoors give children more options for choosing and more freedom in play and exploration. Their play is more vivid than indoors, and the forms of it happen in different groups and gender constellations (Tovey, 2007).

Gair mentions the psychological aspects of outdoor education for self-development, such as the self-esteem, and self-confidence (as cited in Brodin and Lindstrand, 2006). Wagner and Roland (1992) made a distinction between individual and group behaviors, which are affected by outdoor development. Self-esteem and locus of control, faith and confidence in peers were present in the individual part. The group behaviors they revealed were cohesion, clarity, homogeneity and problem solving.

Time spent outdoor is not only seen via psychological changes, but also it has beneficial impacts on medical conditions. Those who play outdoors are more fit than the ones, who spend time inside. Their physical activity is increased by 22% just because of being present in outdoor learning environment’s natural features (Cosco, Moore and Smith, 2014). Finally, also vision
could be developed by spending time outdoors, reduced rates of myopia (nearsightedness) was found among children and adolescents (Rose et al., 2008). Besides these, lower amount of absence was found due sickness (Grahn, Mårtensson, Lindblad, Nilsson, and Ekman, 1997, Söderström, 1998).

2.4 Previous research on inclusion among outdoor settings

Persons with disabilities are attracted to outdoor environments for the same reasons and rewards as individuals without disabilities (Brown, Kaplan and Quaderer, 1999). Some research in the UK and Scotland have shown that children with special needs (autistic spectrum disorder, emotional/behavioral problems, learning difficulties) can benefit from time spent in natural spaces, (Kahn, 1999; Forestry Commission Scotland, 2005; O’Brien, 2005; O’Brien and Murray, 2006; Borradaile, 2006) and it can also help them in anger-management (Roe, Aspinall, 2011). Interactive forms of outdoor learning are useful for people with special needs since they promote learning via the experiential cycle, and can have impact on communication skills, group work, and individual achievement (Farnham and Mutrie, 1997).

There is evidence of the positive impacts of time spent outdoors on typical, and special needs children, including evidence that by placing them physically in the same place can multiply the influence. Furthermore, there is evidence that outdoor education promotes inclusion and prevents exclusion (Brodin and Lindstrand, 2006; Gair, 1997). Some research found out, that people without disabilities had more positive impressions and greater acceptance of people with disabilities after engaging in inclusive outdoor recreation programs (Anderson, Schleien, McAvoy, Lais, and Seligmann, 1997).

While the evidence reviewed in this and the prior sections shows that there is a great deal of research examining the benefits of outdoor activities for typically developing and special needs children, there is little research examining how in the Swedish context, outdoor activities are arranged in order to promote the participation of children with special needs. It is the question that the research presented in this thesis examines.
2.5 Theoretical Framework

Sociocultural theory

Lev Vygotsky, the Russian theorist appreciated the relevance of social interaction, culture and history in learning. The followers of sociocultural learning theory state that in human learning, communication, language, culture, activity and participation are important factors (Daniels, 2001; Illeris, 2007). Vygotsky believed that learning and development happens within interactions, in the case of children it happens with adults, teachers and peers. These social interactions develop language and thinking and can give feedback and reflections which support learning. Knowledge is constructed during interaction with others, and it is shaped by the skills and abilities which are valued in a culture.

Fägerstam (2012), Rickinson et al. (2004) and Jordet (2010) worked out the social aspect of learning in an outdoor learning context. Outdoor environment can have positive impact on social learning, maintaining relationships, and increasing participation and activity. Above this, learning through participation is highlighted by the sociocultural perspective (Illeris, 2002; Jarvis, 2006; Lave and Wenger, 1991). Because of the significant link between learning and social interaction, the current study focused on conducting interviews with preschool practitioners, as preschool is a rich arena of social interaction. Swedish children spend an average of 30 hours in the preschool. Their learning and participation is therefore influenced by their social environment and the people in it. The theory claims, that student’s learning is the most effective through interchange with others in a zone of proximal development (ZPD, Vygotsky, 1998), especially with those, who are more skilled domain practitioners who can “model the internal standards and habits of mind that define advanced competency” (Bennett, 2011, p.7).

Vygotsky saw disability as a sociocultural developmental phenomenon (Gindis, as cited in Vygotsky, 1993). According to him disability’s origin is not seen mainly as biological, but Vygotsky believes in the reflection which happen due to social relations. “Any physical handicap… not only alters the child’s relationship with the world, but above all affects his interaction with people.” (Gindis, 2003, p.203). Vygotsky argued on changing negative societal attitudes toward individuals with disabilities. He focused on strengths, not deficits and weaknesses, which he called “positive differentiation”. Disability is viewed as a dynamic and constant changing process, which is a series of qualitative and dialectic transformations. Since the Swedish Preschool Curriculum and Swedish society’s views on disability, and early childhood education roots in Vygotsky’s theories it is not surprising that they promote these approaches generally.
In my research, sociocultural concept of learning is used to understand pedagogues’ views and their views’ potential influence on children. Vygotsky’s view on disability will help to understand Sweden’s related policies, the Curriculum and pedagogues’ narratives. The ZPD concept helps pedagogues to understand the internal learning of children, and to categorize the stages of their development. The variety of landscapes what nature offers with its non-defined opportunities for learning and moving can also help to extend the learning potential. Overall, the Vygotskyan concept of a child, learning and disability will permeate my thinking in writing, visiting, making interviews and writing the transcriptions.

**Self-determination theory**

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Ryan and Deci, 2000) focuses on children’s basic psychological needs: autonomy, relatedness and competence. Satisfaction of these basic is viewed as increasing the level of engagement during a task, and motivation in completing it. STD’s three components are: “autonomy” which is an expression of self and can be influenced by external factors, but if the learner accepts them, autonomy is maintained. The second is sensing connectedness with others and the sense of community is what they call “relatedness” (Ryan and Deci, 2002). The last component is the need for competence.

According to Murakami:

“having autonomy, experiencing relatedness, and achieving competence are universally important for helping young children in early childhood education settings advance their learning and development. Exploring teachers’ narratives through Self-determination theory lens can help us understand how teachers facilitate children’s learning and development…” (2007, p.4).

My research will draw on SDT for understanding how Swedish pedagogues relate to autonomy, connectedness and relatedness in constructing and maintaining activities for all children in an outdoor environment.

**Theory of Hopkins and Putnam**

Hopkins and Putnam (2000) propose a model of benefits of participation in outdoor environments consisting of three components. First, outdoor learning enhances “the self”, through connecting the effect of challenges and adventurous activities with developing self-conception and self-awareness, so called, the ‘self’. They say it fosters self-discipline, self-respect, physical capabilities to attain and experience success, to accept responsibility,
leadership, and finally it sharpens sensory perception. The second concept, “others,” is connected to group experiences and helps in development, cooperation, and in merging underlying social structures. Learning from each-other, learning’s social-constructed type and viewing outdoors as a powerful medium helps in exploring the nature of communities. The third component reflects nature’s adventurous potential, and physical challenges, and how it affects awareness of nature, which involves valuing beauty, learning to observe, and describe, explaining forms and processes, stimulating imagination (Hopkins and Putnam, 2000).

3 Research Aims/Questions

3.1 Research Aims

The aim of my research is to examine how preschool pedagogues think about inclusion generally in Sweden and how commonly children with special needs are encouraged to participate in a preschool with outdoor learning focus, in the i Ur och Skur, or “Rain or Shine” preschools. Studying the phenomenon of inclusion in i Ur och Skur preschools from the viewpoint of the pedagogues can reveal their beliefs, attitudes, and the challenges they perceive regarding how to create inclusive activities and environments for children with special needs.

3.2 Research questions

The following research questions guided the present study:

1. What do preschool pedagogues in “Rain or Shine” preschools think of having children with special needs in their classes?
2. What are the reasons that children with special needs do or do not attend “Rain or Shine” preschools?
3. What modifications, if any, to pedagogues in “Rain or Shine” schools implement regarding schedules and/or activities related to having children with special needs?
4. What, if any, social and developmental benefits can be identified for children with special needs as a result of their participation in the outdoor activities of the i Ur och Skur preschool?
4 Methods

In order to examine how Swedish preschool pedagogues conceptualize having children with special needs in their classes, I conducted a qualitative study based on semi-structured interviews with *i Ur och Skur* pedagogues. In the following subsections the description of participants and settings, the method of the documentation, analysis and the ethical considerations will be described.

4.1 Setting & Participants

Four pedagogues employed in *i Ur och Skur* preschools were interviewed with whom Swedish children spend the average of 30 hours per week (Garvis and Ødegaard Eriksen, 2018) in order to characterize their conceptualization, experience and perceptions related to the inclusion of children with special needs in their particular pedagogical practice. Based on these interviews the potential benefits and challenges that pedagogues see in sustained participation of special needs children in the outdoor environment are discussed. Three out of the four educators had university degrees in preschool education, and one was an assistant teacher with the appropriate (assistant) education. All the participants were female, and lived in southern Sweden. All preschools and the preschool pedagogues work with *i Ur och Skur* concept. In the study pseudonyms were used instead of the participants' real names.

**Ellen**

Ellen has been working in her preschool for 4 years, and defined herself as an outdoor-lover. Her educational background of her is a *barnskötare* (assistant, in Swedish) with an additional half year studies on children with special needs. Her work experience in preschools lasts more than 25 years. Regarding my topic, is important to mention that the sister of Ellen had cerebral palsy, and in her former workplace she worked as an assistant for a boy with Down Syndrome. Currently she works with the group of the smallest children, age one to three. The preschool where she worked was situated in the suburbs of one of the biggest cities of Sweden.

**Sara**

Being the leader of a department of her preschool, she insisted visiting all the parts of the preschool (including the wooded area, and all the yards) to give a complete impression. She was trained to be an assistant but later she decided to gain a degree in Preschool Education. She has been working in the preschool for 20 years and currently runs the group of 5-year-old children. Her preschool is in the suburb of a small town of Sweden, close to a forest. The
preschool is private and it is situated in a large villa house. An enormous yard belongs to the house, with separated parts and paths leading to the forest.

**Helena**

Helena’s interview took place in the garden of her home, in a small countryside town where she lives and works. Her education was completed at a nearby city’s university, in Preschool Education, which she often mentioned with gratitude. In her preschool group she was the only university educated personnel and she was working with the youngest group of children. The preschool opened less than a year ago. During the interview she frequently resembled signs of hesitance and due to not being completely confident in English, had to look up words in her phone.

**Nejra**

Nejra holds 10-years work experience, and formerly worked in another preschool in the nearby city. She started working in the *i Ur och Skur* preschool in a small town, after the suggestion of Helena. The group of one to two-year-old children belonged to her. Originally, she was born in the former Yugoslavia, and moved to Sweden at the age of eight. This background influenced her philosophy and attitude towards nature and education a lot. The interview took place in her home, and her daughter was present.

4.2 **Documentation Methods**

Individual, semi-structured interviews were conducted for gaining insight into participants’ experiences, attitudes and beliefs on the topic of having special needs children in their “outdoor classroom”. With interviews it is possible to get richer and more vivid data in a qualitative study of people’s perception of a phenomenon (Kvale, 1997). On choosing site for the interview, participants were asked about their preference of the place and the time according to the suggestion of King (2010), which resulted conducting two interviews in preschools, and two in the homes of the participants. With the help of an interview guide (see Appendix A) the chosen method served to ensure the interviewee’s framing and understanding of the questions and for getting answers to the researcher’s questions (Bryman, 2012). The questions were mostly open ended, since they do not limit responses and help the participants to include all information which they want (O’ Hara, Carter, Dewis, Kay and Wainwright, 2011). The interviews were carried out in English and lasted between 44 and 60 minutes.
The sample was looked from an interpretivist view within acknowledging differences between people and people’s view were found important (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2012). Due to the fact, that the researcher interprets the data, and having small sample of interviewees research is not representative to the whole Swedish education system.

4.3 Analysis Methods

Transcripts of the interviews were submitted to thematic analyses (King, 2010). This involved patterns’ and common themes identification of how preschool pedagogues talk about their experience or concept of having children with special needs in their classes. The potential benefits and children’s presence was also analyzed. For identifying themes, the data was read holistically with the help of Braun and Clarke (2006), and for developing the systems, Landridge’s (2004) three stages were used (stage one: descriptive coding, stage two: interpretive coding, stage three: overarching themes). First the data of each interview was analyzed separately in order to identify specific core themes. After the analysis, the themes were compared.

4.4 Ethical Considerations & Recruitment of participants

Recruitment of the interview participants was based on opportunity sampling (Mukherji and Albon, 2010). The different means of recruitment included word of mouth through personal connections and recruitment outreach via social media (see Appendix B, C). The delayed responses, and unexpected withdrawals of participation slowed the procedure of recruitment.

Aspects of research ethics were considered through informing participants about the aims, filling out a consent (See Appendix D), and ensuring confidentiality of the data. All the core ethical principles were followed (Vetenskapsrådet, 2011) and were implemented through the informed consent procedure. The following research is considered as a sensitive education research, since its main focus is exploring perspectives on the lives and beliefs of a group of children with special educational needs. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) state, that the research should, promote the empowerment of disempowered groups. The participation in the study was voluntary (Coady, 2010; Cohen et al, 2011; Swedish Research Council, 2017) and all the participants agreed having the interview sessions recorded.
5 Findings & Discussion

Two main themes emerged from the interviews. The first theme is describing the view of special needs children in the *i Ur och Skur* preschools through the lens of pedagogues. The second theme focused on pedagogues’ applications of these views in practice. The latter topic splits up into two parts according to the type of the special need (involving children with physical disability or neurodevelopmental/cognitive impairment). Every theme may not represent all individual pedagogues’ opinion, but together, they represent a holistic understanding of the investigated questions.

5.1 The view of special needs children in the *i Ur och Skur* Preschools

5.1.1 Special Needs Children’s presence in the *i Ur och Skur* Preschools

According to the interviewees, children with special needs are present in preschools which are using the *i Ur och Skur* concept, but not in high numbers. At the time of the interviews the following examples were described as a type of special need that children had who attended these preschools. The definition of the term “special need” relied on the pedagogues’ understanding:

- pervasive developmental disorder due to premature birth
- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
- Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)
- issues with focusing/concentration
- problems with anger-control
- behavioral and interactional problems due to post traumatic stress and memories of war
- nasal probe and probability of other delays (cognitive and motor)
- diabetes
- bad eye-sight

I found that the preschools varied in their ways of thinking about and implementing approaches to working with children with special needs. Only one preschool consulted with a special needs teacher (*special pedagog*, in Swedish): a school with a child that had pervasive developmental disorder. The special needs teacher mostly observes children in their group environment, which is followed by a discussion with the preschool teachers (in this case Helena and Nejra) who then inform parents. Helena and Nejra both mentioned dissatisfaction about their current special needs teacher (since they work in the same preschool) and the overall
According to them, special needs teachers’ reliability is questionable, since they frequently switch workplace due to their workload. Special needs teachers are not observing children accurately enough and they rely too much on the information which is provided by the teachers, consequently the support is one-sided. This demand for more awareness and help from special needs teachers is in line with the study of Werts, Wolery, Snyder and Caldwell, (1996) who found, that teachers who perceived the students with disabilities as severe found the availability of help and resources lower than the required level.

Preschool staffs’ reports about which children are eligible for special support can differ from the opinion of others and can cause limitation to the current research (children who the interviewees mention might not be diagnosed or evaluated by others, and children with diagnosis might not be defined as with special needs by the pedagogues). It is not known, nor defined precisely who have diagnosis or in need of support in the *i Ur och Skur* preschools. The reason behind the pedagogues’ hesitation in responding to questions which are connected with or contain the word “disability” or “special needs”, may happen due to the following reasons: (1) Sweden is a country which made an effort to get away from disability-based classifications (Nilholm, Almqvist, Göransson and Lindqvist, 2013) so for the pedagogues it was uncomfortable to talk about disability, and special needs since the terms are more deficit oriented and stigmatizing, however this view is personally and nationally overstepped. In line with this approach, the term ‘pupil in need of special support’ is used in Sweden which is a category that children can ‘walk in and out of’ (Nilholm et al., 2013) so preschool pedagogues think about it more as a dynamic phenomenon rather than a permanent issue. (2) Since Swedish educational guidelines regarding the responsibility for children in need of special support are more clearly defined for leaders of compulsory schools than for leaders of preschools, (Government Office 1994 cited in Göransson, Nilholm and Karlsson, 2011) pedagogues are lacking information, suggestions and guidelines regarding to special needs children’s support. In Sweden municipalities have the responsibility to take care of children who need special support consequentially is not much connected to preschool pedagogues’ daily job. Preschool age children are only eligible for resources if their test results and the assessment indicate that (Sandberg, Norling, and Lillvist, 2009). According to Lillvist and Granlund (2009), the majority of children who would need special support are undiagnosed children that have difficulties functioning in the preschool context. Third (3) some symptoms, differences or delays of children are not visible yet due to young age and less maturity (especially in the case of Ellen, Nejra, and Helena, who with children between 1-3-year olds). As Ellen noted, “we don’t have
anyone with diagnose, but maybe have kids who will come to diagnosis when they are older.”

(4) Since Sweden’s policy of assessment is focusing more on school-aged children and not on earlier years, preschool aged children are not likely to be diagnosed, labelled or tested (Wilder, 2015). These factors may play a role in how the pedagogues define children’s special needs, this making elicitation of their perspectives on this issue more difficult to achieve (Simeonsson, 2006).

5.1.2 The way parents choose preschool

Pedagogues’ opinions about what motivates parents in choosing an i Ur och Skur preschool were similar. Either parents choose this type of preschool because they believe in the importance of time spent outdoors, or it was the closest preschool geographically to the family. The answers of the pedagogues were very much in line with the findings of Löfdahl and Pérez Prieto (2009), that most parents in Sweden pick preschool without being careful of concepts, profiles, presentations and quality, and they simply send their child to their neighborhood school.

When it came to the question of having a child with special needs in the class, some pedagogues connected their answers directly to parents’ decision on enrolling or not enrolling them there. In most cases they believed that parents worry about their child’s safety more outdoors, including worrying about, that the adaptations of outdoor activities are less inclusive for children with special needs compared to adaptations of indoor environments.

Ellen directly connected special needs children’s presence with the parents’ choice. She drew on her own experiences having a sister with cerebral palsy who had difficulty walking and was mostly confined to a wheelchair. According to her, parents think i Ur och Skur is not suitable for children with more severe intellectual or motor disability.

If you are a parent of a disabled kid, I don’t think you are going for an Ur och Skur, because it is not suitable. When you are a parent in Sweden, you can choose. And I don’t think they choose us. My parents would never have sent my sister to an Ur och skur, because it would be harder for them. So, I think it would be harder for them. (Ellen)

Worrying about the safety of children, who have motor-based problem is not an individual concern. For example, parents of children with a motor-based problem (developmental coordination disorder) described their child’s safety as one of their biggest worries (Missiuna, Moll, King, King and Law, 2007) which according to the pedagogues have a bigger relevance in the outdoor environment.
This opinion about parents of special needs children not choosing *i Ur och Skur* was also shared by Nejra and Helena. Nejra explained:

**Interviewer:** And do you think that like parents of children with special needs chose *Ur och Skur*?

**Nejra:** I think not. I think people would be more scared of maybe choosing *Ur och Skur* if you have children with disability

**Interviewer:** What do you think what scares them?

**Nejra:** I think, that we go to the woods a lot. Maybe they would be extra scared for their security. Maybe if they would have an assistant all the time but it would be hard I don't know maybe.

Parent’s may have lack of knowledge about the *i Ur och Skur* concept, or not knowing about the particular preschool’s resources, advantages or inclusiveness. This lack is not likely “corrected” by visiting or trying out the preschool.

**Helena:** I think parents can be a little bit sceptical. Because naturally if you have a disabled child, I don’t think that comes to mind is nature. But we want to change that and bring nature to every child and outdoors. I think they are curious and I think when they contact us that our how we talk to them, and how we work.

There was only one pedagogue, Sara, who believed that parents of a child with special need do not choose *i Ur och Skur* because either they do not see outdoor activities as important or because they prefer a geographically closer school.

Löfdahl and Pérez Prieto (2009) showed that some preschool teachers in Sweden are not able to represent their strengths nor to describe their practices, but rather just stick to templates and present a picture of a pedagogically ordinary preschool. This lack of knowledge in parents occurs also when they choose preschool for a child with special needs, since parents of children with cognitive impairment living in Sweden have reported difficulties in acquiring knowledge regarding available services and in gaining access to such services (Nowak, Broberg, and Starke, 2013)

### 5.1.3 General benefits of outdoors, according to the pedagogues

Pedagogues’ belief in the benefits of time spent outdoor, and in the *i Ur och Skur* concept was in line with prior findings. The fact that all pedagogues described themselves as outdoor-lovers could influence their critical thinking about outdoors’s beneficial impact.
Time spent outdoor’s beneficial effect on physical development and motor skills were highlighted, such as in the findings of Fjørtoft (1999, 2001). Nejra stated that “The natural obstacles, that occur in the woods help. You have the stones are falling over trees and they evolve their balance and strength. This is better in the woods so that’s first of all. And running around on concrete is not really developing for the children.”

All the pedagogues claimed that the children slept for longer periods of time and more deeply, as well observing that the children ate more if they spent previously time outdoors. In line with Fjørtoft (2001), some of the interviewed pedagogues claimed that children were more imaginative, and became calmer and more open and more prepared for studies indoors, due to the previously time spent outdoors. The varieties of children’s play forms, including imaginary play, was discussed during the interviews from several aspects. Nature with its not pre-defined affordances create an environment which relies a lot on children’s imagination according to Ellen. Sara stated that children can never get bored outside, “they play everything they see or experience. Everything is possible and they play everything. They have so much fantasy” (Sara).

Experiencing calmness in the woods was emphasized by Nejra. She noted that children and pedagogues alike become calm and relaxed. Helena agreed, however she claimed a negative effect of nature arguing that nature can cause stress in someone, who is not familiar with it. “I like the outside yes, I do. And in the forest, I always feel calm. When we took out the children they were just like this ‘aaah’ (deep sighting), calmness in the group immediately evolved when we got to the woods.” (Nejra)

Being more calm leads to less conflicts in the group, according to several pedagogues. As Wagner and Roland (1992) found in the self-reports of their participants, people experience problem solving and homogeneity in their groupworks much more often, and overall more group cohesiveness in outdoor settings than indoors. Sara and Helena talked about future-oriented topics during the discussion. Sara highlighted that time spent outdoors and the preschool’s sustainability-promoting activities will reflect in the future choices of the children, which is much in line with the Curriculum’s approach to motivate children at early age to have a continuous focus on nature (Skolverket,2010).

According to her, these years can influence the following years of schooling. Generally, pedagogues believe there is much responsibility on them because they have to provide a base ground for children’s future schooling both in respect of helping physical and cognitive development, and in founding a positive emotional experience towards educational institutions. (Helena)

18
Gaining confidence via outdoor activities can take place in many different contexts. Children become more resourceful and confident, since they have more opportunities to identify and solve problems in the *I Ur och Skur* environment e.g.: boiling water, making fire and cooking, according to Sara. Wells and Evans (2003) also revealed the improvement of self-confidence due children’s participation in outdoor activities and the Self-determination Theory describes grown confidence due to outdoor activities too (Ryan and Deci, 2000).

5.1.4 Inclusion and acceptance - “They learned his issues, like he learned theirs”

In discussing the importance of promoting acceptance of and among everyone in their preschools children and adults alike, the preschool pedagogues were careful to speak from their own perspective and attempted to take the perspectives of the typically developed children and the special needs children. Since they are preschool pedagogues, they must set an example with how they talk and act to other co-workers or to children.

According to Helena, the pedagogues should involve every child in planning the activities and schedule. Furthermore, she noted that the pedagogues are careful not to highlight differences between children:

I think they realize that they are different, but I think they think it’s okay, because he is just like that or she is just like that. I think they get used to it. So, it is how we do it as teachers. We should handle that, like not doing a big thing of it. (Ellen)

**Interviewer:** Do you think that the other children experience something that for example this boy is different than them?

**Helena:** No, I really don’t think so. We work really hard not to point out. We want every child, to be special and to have a value. So that’s something we work really hard with and we talk a lot about it. We try to be discrete when one child has issue, or problem. And not to highlight that.

Nejra agreed, noting that children realize all the differences between each other, but without “labelling” one’s abilities they only recognize other’s skills or characteristic. She mentioned: “Children are smart they know exactly which buttons to press on for certain children, who you can ask. I mean they observe a lot, they knew a lot, who was good with the scissors and who to go when they need to write something.”

As the preschool pedagogues stated, children work better outside together and experience less conflict. This is in line with Gair’s (1997) research noting that in nature it is not
likely that someone feels excluded. For children with special needs to experience themselves as a part of a group, is not only in line with OECD (2011) recommendations, but generally promotes social integration /inclusion. The reason why the interviewed pedagogues avoided labeling the children can be understood through the lens of Molin’s (2004) research where it was found, that children’s self-image could be threatened when they are labeled with cognitive impairment.

In the inclusive setting people can learn more from each other than in non-inclusive setting. Special needs children if they are included, can learn through participation from the sociocultural perspective (Illeris, 2002, 2007; Jarvis, 2006; Lave and Wenger, 1991). Going outside and teachers’ role setting can both work as a medium in Vygotsky’s mediated learning theory, which supports learning in general (Gindis, 2003; Kozulin, 2003). The model that pedagogues are setting with their acceptance and promoting equality influence children’s views. Since adults described, that these acts have an impact and children follow and imitate them with acting according to this, learning happens according to the sociocultural approach, in the social context.

5.2 Involving children with special needs in the i Ur och Skur preschools

The view of involving children with special needs in the preschool splits into two bigger themes. The first theme includes involving children with physical disabilities in the preschools and the potential adjustments which were made for them, meanwhile the second theme focuses on involving children with neurodevelopmental disorders and cognitive impairments and the adjustments.

5.2.1 Involving children with physical disability

Imagining the involvement of a child who is physically disabled, or even sitting in a wheelchair was the most difficult for all the participants compared to other scenarios. Only one of the preschools described an actual example from the past of a girl with walking difficulties (sometimes wheelchair user) and in another preschool a premature child’s delayed motor development was described. In the other cases pedagogues only imagined situation involving a child with physical disability or based their argument on previous personal experiences (from other preschools, or previous involvement in projects). The pedagogues did not mention much adaptation, or adjustment of the environment for children with special needs. Although it is known, that non-adapted environments can indicate the social isolation children with physical disabilities (Mundhenke, Hermansson and Sjöqvist Nätterlund, 2010).
Pedagogues’ opinions were on a continuum in which Ellen and Sara were positioned on opposite ends. Ellen, who had a sister with cerebral palsy and used a wheelchair, said that it would be impossible to involve someone with a wheelchair in their preschool precisely she stated: “I don’t think it’s good to have a wheelchair or something. Because I think that’s hard to be, to participate, if someone coming with a wheelchair, we always have to take care of them absolutely. I think it’s harder in an Ur och Skur”.

On the other hand, Sara (who previously worked as an assistant for a child who used a wheelchair) believed that children with physical disabilities can benefit the most from the Ur och Skur approach. The difficulty of keeping someone warm, who is not moving enough, or the circulation of the blood has trouble was a shared concern. Sara claimed: “the challenge we always every year recognize it’s the cold. Some children who have disabled moving, they don’t keep their warmth and that’s one thing we can’t deal with.”

In most cases the teachers agreed, that someone with a physical disability would enjoy being outdoors. Ellen, however argued that someone with a physical disability might experience nature negatively, as being outside might highlight possibilities and activities, which he or she would not be able to do.

The concerns of parents and pedagogues are not unique. Missiuna at el. (2007) found that parents who had children with motor developmental issues claimed that their children are rather “observers” during play and they do not take physical risks. Even when they were outside, children constantly needed parents to stay close, and they felt the importance of making sure of children’s safety, and prevent them from falling.

Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that according to the theory of Hopkins and Putnam (2000), challenges and adventurous activities are important contributors to the development of self-concept and self-awareness, so called for the ‘self’. Also, it can impact physical capabilities, attaining and experiencing success, accepting responsibility, leadership, and finally sharpening sensory perception, all of which are important in human development.

Different opinions about “fitting” into the i Ur och Skur preschool’s concepts were described by Sara (who previously participated in a project where pedagogues worked on bringing nature closer to disabled children). She argued that walking aids and wheelchairs did not cause any limits outside and children were freely lying on the ground, grabbing the grass and experiencing the different affordances with active senses. It is also important to stress the fact, that Sara’s strong view could be biased by the fact, that the forest-area which is nearby her preschool is accessible with any kind of vehicle.
As an adjustment for children, pedagogues suggested using a handle or handrail, but most of all they stressed the importance of having additional personnel, “a hand to hold”. The person should be present and help outside, support with being physically closer to the child, helping in moving with slower pace, and providing extra care and attention during activities. An extra person’s presence, or “the hand” as an ultimate solution was mentioned in the case of the prematurely born child. Nejra mentioned how important it is for this child to stay close to the pedagogues, and if they walk away he gets abandoned and sad, and always needed holding hand during the walks.

It is important to bear in mind, that providing too much time and help can lead to enjoying only the pedagogue’s company. Watson found out, that there is a tendency that disabled children in school spend much of their time in the company of the school’s staff, rather than other children (Watson et al., 2000). This phenomenon does not promote full inclusion, or interaction between children with typical and atypical development.

Helena and Nejra emphasized the importance of returning with the children to familiar outdoor places, with well-known surfaces, and supporting sitting position outside with a log, and extra branches. For the inside environment they claimed the importance of observing and following the premature born child’s movements, and changing the furniture’s according to that. As an example, they presented for supporting painting, taking away the tables and putting palettes on the floor instead was more comfortable for this child, and sharp edges of furniture were covered to prevent injury.

5.2.2 Involving children with neurodevelopmental disorders or cognitive impairment

There was no child with severe cognitive impairment enrolled in the studied preschools, only one child had neurodevelopmental disorders. The pedagogues’ ideas about involving children with more severe cognitive impairment was only based on speculation, or knowledge from their previous experiences in the outdoor setting. It is possible that the lack of mention by the interviewees of children with more serious cognitive impairment might due to the tendency for children with intellectual disability to be diagnose when they enter to school age (Wilder, 2015).

All pedagogues agreed that it was important to include children with neurodevelopmental disorders and cognitive impairment into their preschools, but had different viewpoints. When it came to the question of having special needs children in class Ellen mentioned her supposition, which represented only her understanding about the phenomena.
She stated: “We have a lot of kids with neural problems like, autism, or ADHD. They are too small. But I think a lot of them will have, will come to that diagnosis.” (Ellen)

It was argued, that the presence of a child with special needs requires flexibility in the preschool schedule based on the child’s needs (eating, sleeping, moving), a flexibility that the preschools claimed to have in principle. Sara argued that this would also require assistance from an additional person, with additional time: “Special needs take special time”. In other cases, pedagogues mentioned providing visual aids in the schedule and its changes, for children who “need” these aids.

In every interview, discussions emerged about children’s needs for physical space. Outlet for children’s energy is the most effective if it takes place outside and it can lead to less frustration. Sara claimed, that being outside is not only good for these children because of possibilities of bigger and more active movements, but also outdoors lack of predefined affordances comparing to indoors, so outdoors has a less culturally shaped quality which can support more children’s imagination. Some mentioned connecting to the potential benefits for children with ADHD or ASD, some associated space as fostering in gaining confidence. If space is given to children, it was argued, then they can make more independent decisions about the forms and amounts of interaction. Sara stated: “They have the space to make sure that they can invite to our space, or chose not to. So, I think when they have the space, they can most likely grow and slowly and make their space narrower. Because of personal space I think they are more confident”.

In their statements, the pedagogues associated more space with autonomy and with building of children’s confidence. Learning and development of young children happens the best, if the basic psychological needs are satisfied, according to the Self Determination Theory, where reaching autonomy is the first component. Here, the expression of self through autonomy is an essential factor in learning and enhances confidence. (Ryan and Deci, 2000)

A psychologist was in one case included, where adopted twins needed additional support because of bad memories from the war which led the twins to behave rudely toward others. In this case psychologist look after the twins and their integration with assisting in their appropriate interactions.

All the educators interviewed believed that the concept of Uroch Skur “fits to children” (with cognitive impairment) and it can be especially beneficial for their motor development. According to Ellen, activities and teaching needs to be done on the “right level” of children and it needs to be done coherently with the other workers. “So, I think that would be really good if you are doing it on the right level.” (Ellen)
Sara highlighted a similar thing with other words. She stated, that it is important not to expect impossible progress, but find the appropriate developmental potentials.

I always think if you draw the line too high, maybe that can be a problem. If you push them too hard. You have to draw the line where every child is standing. You have to make a big balance not to push much, but do push. When you not know how much they can do or can’t do because they don’t have the normal development. When they have disability, you don’t know what to expect, or how much to push. You have to find out how each children function. (Sara)

For adjustment Ellen mentioned being physically closer to these children, talking with more explanation and using sign language. Sara was very hesitant and claimed many times the difficulty of finding the appropriate adjustment or help, but using more gestures was agreed by her too.

Nejra highlighted an interesting aspect of the benefits, which was the outdoor effect of the environment’s stimuli on more active sensation which makes activities more enjoyable for children. In the imagined situation she suggested focusing more on sensory stimulation rather than building up knowledge. She said: ”I think it would be more maybe basically just being there and a lot of touching and smelling and more focused on that I think on the senses rather than learning different types of birds and ants.” (Nejra)

Figuring out the most appropriate kind of help and relying on the wishes or responses of someone who’s intellect is not typical developed can be challenging. Seen from the perspective of Vygotsky’s (1998) “zone of proximal development,” the specific challenge concerns identifying children’s current and future capabilities, and approaches for bridging the two. Pedagogues put themselves at the center of deciding and implementing the methods, content and adaptations to create scaffold this learning. In the concept of “mediated learning” Vygotsky argued, that an adult is needed in the learning of disabled children who chooses, decides and interprets stimuli for children (Kozulin, 2003).

Being able to concentrate and focus more after time spent outdoors for children with ADHD is supported by the Attention Restoration Theory with the findings of the positive effect of nature’s stimuli on mental fatigue and concentration (Kaplan and Kaplan, 1989).

In contrast to my findings, there is an international attitude, that preschool teachers are willing more to include children with severe physical disabilities, rather than who had severe cognitive disabilities (Rakap, Parlak-Rakap and Aydin, 2016).
6 Conclusion

Given the ample evidence that time spent outdoors has physical and psychological benefits for both typically developing and special needs children, the current study drew on teachers’ narratives to better understand how Swedish preschool pedagogues think about and address the challenges of including children with special needs in activities in the natural environment (Bramnan, 2003). Four preschool pedagogues’ perspectives were studied, all of whom worked within the Swedish *i Ur och Skur* tradition. Pedagogues’ conceptualization of inclusion of children with special needs, the presence of children with special needs, the types of special needs negotiated by the pedagogues, and the optimal adjustments and implications of outdoor participation were investigated.

For understanding the views of the pedagogues, characteristics of integration and inclusion were examined with particular focus on the policies that shape current practices in Swedish preschool provision. Also for understanding the culture of the participants, and the parents who choose these preschools for their children, the history of outdoor learning in relation to Swedish preschool provision was taken into account. During the interviews it was found that preschool pedagogues had a generally positive attitude toward outdoor activities, believing that these activities yielded benefits for the children who participated in them. Although the pedagogues also stated an overall positive attitude towards the topic of inclusion, there appeared to be certain biases: Sweden’s approach of getting away from disability-based classifications (Nilholm, Almqvist, Göransson and Lindqvist, 2013), usage of other terms to describe children with special need (Nilholm et al., 2013), pedagogue’s lack of information, and focusing on developmental assessment in a later age (Wilder, 2015).

What constituted a special need, from the perspective of the pedagogues, varied (e.g. from needing a walking aid, or having a diagnosis of developmental delays, to problems with concentration or bad eyesight). Although pedagogues stated that all children with special needs enjoy nature, and have a right to be there, they felt that there were less possibilities for including children with physical challenges than with cognitive or neurodevelopmental. Due to the high number of outdoor spent hours, and to the difficulties posed by unexpected natural and weather-based occurrences, the teachers believe it was hard to include children with physical disabilities, especially those who use wheelchairs. For adjustment an extra helping person’s presence, “a holding hand,” and physical accessibility of outdoor spaces were mentioned. In the case of children with neurodevelopmental disorders and cognitive impairment, pedagogues were more positive in their argument of *i Ur och Skur*’s fit and enjoyment. As helpful practice, focusing
more on processing stimuli, sensing, using more sign language and an extra person’s presence were proposed. Giving children enough space outside was a core solution offered, which they believed had implications for the development of children’s confidence, social interactions, and concentration.

Limitation of the study can be caused by having interviewed four participants and holding the interview not in their mother tongue. Asking more pedagogues from a wider selection of *i Ur och Skur*, or even “regular” preschool can direct the future research of the topic. At the question of “Do you have children with special needs in your preschool?” some of the interviewees paused and turned into silence. The frequent pauses, usage of Swedish words and checking for translations assumed that they were either not familiar with the appropriate terminology or did not feel comfortable or competent in the topic which could also limit my research. The theme, which evolved during the interview can serve useful information is examining the criteria of how parents of children with special needs are choosing preschools to their children.

This research focused on the topic of inclusion in a country which is famous for its efforts to support it; however, as this study shows, in practice achieving this inclusion is a challenge. Supporting parents to choose preschool circumspectly, choosing proper support and providing appropriate knowledge for pedagogues need extension and strengthening.
7 References


Appendices

Appendix A- Interview Guide

INTERVIEW GUIDE OF RAMONA NÁDASDY FOR PRESCHOOL PEDAGOGUES IN “I UR OCH SKUR” PRESCHOOLS

1. Can you tell me a little about yourself?
2. Why did you choose to become a teacher?
3. Where did you get your education?
4. For how long have you been working here?
5. How did you choose to work here?
6. How was your experience with nature before? Are you have you always been an outdoor/friluftsliv person?
7. In what way were you prepared for working in this kind of pre-school during your studies?
8. What is your job here?
9. What age group are you working with?
10. How many children are in your group?
11. How does a typical day look like in your preschool?
12. What is the attitude of children towards nature?
13. Do you think the environment where a day is spent is important for children?
14. In what ways do you think nature and being outdoor contributes to children?
15. Do you have any children with special needs in your preschool?
16. Have you had any?
17. Do you have any experience of someone from your life who had special needs?

IF YES

18. What was his/her special need?
19. Did/Do you have to change or modify anything on schedule or environment because of them (with a particular focus on the outdoors)?
20. Have you experienced any challenges because of them? (with a particular focus on outdoors)
21. What do you think is the impact of „i Ur och Skur” on them?
22. Does outdoor learning have any impact on their motor skills?
23. Do they get tired more easily?
24. Do they enjoy being outdoors?
25. Does it have any impact on their attention span?
26. Does it have any impact on their confidence?
27. What was the attitude of the parents towards having their child in an Ur och Skur?
28. Do you think this concept “fits” to them?
29. How do you think other children experience special needs children’s presence?

IF NOT

17. Why do you think there are no children with special needs here?
18. Do you think that other “I Ur och Skur” preschools they attend?
19. Do you think this model fits to them?
20. Do you think you would have to modify some things because of them? (due to the outdoor thing)?
21. What challenges could you imagine that would occur both indoors and outdoors?
22. What would be the parents attitude towards Ur och Skur?
23. Do you think there would be impacts on their motor skills?
24. Do you think there would be impacts on their attention span?
25. Would they enjoy being outdoors?
26. Do you think that it had any impact on the other children? How would they experience it?
Appendix B- Letter to preschools/directors asking for participation

Dear XXXX,

My name is Ramôna Nádasdy, and I am an international student of Jönköping University's EDUCARE program (which is about Swedish preschool model) and a former Special Education teacher.

In the following weeks, for my Master Thesis, I am conducting a research project, where I would like to examine pedagogues’ conceptualization about children with special needs, in the Ur och Skur setting. To gain a deep understanding, I am making interviews with preschool teachers in Sweden, who work in a preschool with "i Ur och Skur" concept.

I would like to inquire, if You, our Your colleagues would be willing to help me in sometime between March-April and participate in a one-hour semi-formal interview? Advance English is not needed, and every help would be highly appreciated. I assure you that any information provided to me will be treated confidentially and that the school’s name along with any children or staff will not be mentioned.

Looking forward of hearing back,
Kind Regards, Ramona Nadasdy
Appendix C- Letter to preschool pedagogues asking for participation

Dear XXXX,

I am Ramóna Nádasdy, a student of Jönköping University’s EDUCARE program.

In my research project I would like to examine pedagogues’ conceptualization about children with special needs, in the Ur och Skur setting. I found you through the social media, when I was looking for participant. I am asking, if you would be willing to participate in a maximum one-hour long interview sometimes in March, or April? I am highly flexible about time and place.

Advance English is not needed, and every help would be highly appreciated.

Kind Regards, Ramona Nadasdy
Appendix D- Consent form

Adult Consent to Participate in Student Research
International Master’s Program in Swedish Preschool Education (Educare)
Spring 2018

Ramóna Nádasdy is conducting a study as part of her requirements for successful completion of the Thesis Project course in the International Master’s Program in Swedish Preschool Education (Educare) at Jönköping University. The general focus of the study is to examine pedagogical and didactic questions concerning preschool policy and practice. More specifically, this research study examines “The approaches of working with students with special needs in Forest Pedagogy (I Ur och Skur) preschools in Sweden”.

Ramóna Nádasdy is conducting this study in order to (a) contribute knowledge to our overall understanding of preschool education; (b) gain experience conducting empirical research in education; and (c) fulfill requirements needed to graduate with a master of science degree (60 credits) from the International Master’s Program in Swedish Preschool Education in the School of Education and Communication at Jönköping University.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to do one or more of the following

___ Participate in an interview or interviews related to the research topic.

___ Grant your permission to be observed engaging in daily school activities.

Any information that is gathered will be anonymized to ensure that you cannot be identified. Additionally, all information gathered will be stored securely to prevent loss or theft.

You have the right to withdraw your consent to participate in the study at any time, for whatever reason, without any consequences.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this research study and/or your participation, please contact [INSERT STUDENT RESEARCHER’S NAME & CONTACT INFO] and/or the course leader and master’s program director, Robert Lecusay (robert.lecusay@ju.se).

If you agree to participate, please print and sign your name below. You will be given a copy of this consent form for your records.

Participant’s contact number and/or email: __________________________________________

Date: _____________________________________________________________________
Participant Name (printed)  
Participant Signature

Student Researcher Name (printed)  
Student Researcher Signature