“Children in preschool class have to learn to sit a bit more”

Swedish preschool, preschool class and primary school teachers’ perspectives on the transition from preschool to school

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Abstract

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“Children in preschool class have to learn to sit a bit more”: Swedish preschool, preschool class and primary school teachers’ perspectives on the transition from preschool to school

The transition from preschool to primary school is considered by many researchers as being one of the most challenging transitions that children can experience in their educational development. In 1998, in an effort by the Swedish government to facilitate this transition, preschool class was introduced as a voluntary bridge year between preschool and primary school. Changes in school legislation in 2018 made attendance to preschool class compulsory. Despite the introduction of preschool class in the Swedish system, a lack of knowledge and research about the policies and practices in preschool classes for successful supporting this transition has been observed. The aim of the present qualitative study was to characterize preschool, preschool class, and primary school teachers’ understandings of the transition from preschool to primary school as reflected in their teaching practices. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with preschool, preschool class and primary school teachers at one school and affiliated preschool in a town in the South of Sweden. Observations of the preschool class were also conducted. Theories of transition were applied to analyze the teachers’ understandings of the transition from preschool to primary school. All of the participating teachers considered the change to compulsory attendance in preschool class to be beneficial for a successful transition for the children from preschool to primary school. Two key factors were identified that appeared to be consequential for how the teachers understood and worked with children’s transitions: (a) the organizational structures in place to support the teachers’ work, related to the teachers’ ability to coordinate with each other and have access to information relevant to prepare the children for the transition; and (b) the lack of a common pedagogical framework across the preschool and school.

Key words: Sweden, preschool class, transition, teachers’ understandings, preschool, primary school.
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1. Introduction

The transition from preschool to primary school has been recognised by many researchers as being one of the most challenging educational transitions that children experience. The discontinuity between the years preceding school and school contexts is according to different authors “one of many complex differences that children must adapt to when they commence formal schooling” (Hirst, Jervis, Visagie, Sojo and Cavanagh, 2011, p. 10). During the past decade in many countries, and especially in Sweden, political and social attention on early childhood education has been growing, however, there is still a lack of knowledge about what policies and practices are needed for successful transitions (OECD, 2017).

Recent legislative changes in Sweden have made it compulsory, as of 2018, for children ages 6-7 to attend what is known as “förskoleklass” or “preschool class.” Preschool class was designed to be a kind of bridge between preschool and primary school. This change in the legislation demonstrates an increasing interest in all children attending school earlier and being prepared to enter primary school (OECD, 2017). Prior to the preschool class, children from 1-5 years old attend preschool (förskola). Although preschool is a voluntary school system provided by municipalities, “in 2003 75% of the children attended preschool, ranging from 40% for the 1-year olds to 89% for the 5-year olds” (Engdahl, 2004, p. 1). Swedish preschool has its own curriculum and has its focus on children’s individual needs and interests, following a social pedagogy approach. It emphasizes the importance of play and outdoor activities in the child’s development, as well as providing opportunities for exploration and creative activities (Skolverket, 2011, 2018). In contrast, compulsory school (Preschool Class to 9th grade) in Sweden follows a separate curriculum from preschool. Preschool and compulsory school are very different educational settings, with different forms of organization and ways to work, assess and evaluate the learning and development of the children. The two curriculums have different expectations regarding goals related to education. The preschool curriculum is based on goals to strive for, not reach; this contrasts with the school curriculum which lays out specific goals that teachers are expected to reach (Skolverket, 2018). However, preschool class stands as an
important exception within the compulsory curriculum, focusing, like the preschool does, on goals to strive for. Given the clear differences in expectations about how children’s learning is supported and assessed in the two environments of preschool and primary school, it is important to gain a better understanding of how to support children’s transitions from one environment to the other.

In order to address the gap in the literature on how to facilitate a successful transition between preschool and grade school in Sweden, this study investigated how teachers in Sweden understand the transition from preschool to primary school and attempt to facilitate the transition in their practices in the classroom. The study combined semi-structured interviews and observations in a preschool class. The interviews were conducted with a preschool teacher, a preschool class teacher and a first-grade primary teacher within a school in a small town in Southern Sweden. The interviews focused on the teachers their reflections and perspectives concerning their approach to the preschool-to-school transition. Observations in the preschool class focused on how the teacher applied her perspectives on facilitating the transition in practice. An analysis of these observations and interviews was compared with the previous literature related to the transition from preschool to primary school in Sweden. The results of this study provide a deeper understanding of the meaning of the transition from preschool to primary school in Sweden and the ways to facilitate this transition.

2. Background / Prior research

The following section surveys the different meanings of “transition” in educational contexts, analysing in specific how the transition from preschool to primary school is understood in Sweden. Following this, an overview will be provided of the Swedish educational system - including policies, curriculum and philosophies related to preschool class - in order to characterize the role of preschool class in the Swedish educational framework. Difficulties and challenges in preschool class in Sweden will be also examined.
2.1. Theories of Transition

According to the Cambridge Dictionary, some definitions of the word *transition* are: “a change from one form or type to another, or the process by which this happens” and “the process of changing, or a change from one form or condition to another”. The concept of transition is usually described as a process of moving from one context or situation to another (Ackesjö, 2013). Ackesjö (2013) draws on Van Gennep’s (1909) conception of transition as a process that takes place in different phases. He argues that in life, a person experiences passages and crossings. He divides these passages into three phases: preliminal rites (rites of separation), liminal rites (rites of transition) and postliminal rites (rites of incorporation). The different rites can overlap each other; thus, children’s transition from preschool to first grade primary school, could be understood as a rite of separation (from preschool) and also as a rite of incorporation (to school).

Transition in the context of education can also be seen from an ecological systems perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), where the child’s development is seen as shaped by the socio-cultural context created by the preschool, preschool class, school, parents and home, which in turn are understood in terms of microsystems, mesosystems and macrosystems through which children move during their early years of education. At the level of microsystems are the child’s interactions with people and the environment in school and home, for example. At the level of the mesosystem, one studies the interactions among the different domains in the micro system (e.g. the relationship between school and home). At the level of the macrosystem, one examines how social and educational policies affect and influence what takes place at the level of the micro and mesosystems (e.g. the policy level change in preschool class from voluntary to compulsory attendance). Two other levels are part of this system, the chronosystem, which focuses on the interaction between the various systems and how they affect one another over time, and the exosystem, which contains the settings that the child does not actively participate in but have a deep effect on the child’s development. In the transition from preschool to primary
school, the children's development is impacted by the different interactions and relationships between the ecological systems.

Fabian and Dunlop (2007) define the educational transition as “the process of change of environment and set of relationships that children make from setting or phase of education to another over time” (2007, p. 3). Swedish preschool class is seen as a transitional stage in the children’s lives and is expected to take into account the previous experiences and knowledge that children have created in preschool, as well as to prepare them for further schooling (Ackesjö, 2010). The transition to school “involves negotiating and adjusting to a number of changes including the physical environment, learning expectations, rules and routines, social status and identity, and relationships for children and families” (Hirst, Jervis, Visagie, Sojo and Cavanagh, 2011, p. 5). These changes demand children to construct their identity, creating an interpretation of the old and new situation that they are living. Consequently, during transitions children construct and reconstruct knowledge; safety zones are left by the children to face unknown and new educational contexts. At the same time, emotional changes, including feelings of nervousness, anxiety, insecurity may also affect the children all along the transitions (Ackesjö, 2013).

### 2.2. Transition from preschool to school in Sweden: preschool class

Preschool class in Sweden was introduced in 1998 as a voluntary part of the school system in order to facilitate the integration between preschool and compulsory school (Alatalo, 2015). In 2018, attendance to preschool class became mandatory. Prior to this 94% of the 6-year-olds in Sweden were already attending the preschool class (Engdahl, 2004). Most Swedish preschool classes are located on the premises of compulsory schools, thus the next legislation on compulsory attendance in the preschool class brings students into the formal schooling environment one year earlier than previously mandated (Ackesjö, 2013). The Swedish preschool class “is supposed to function as a bridge or mode of transition between early childhood education and compulsory school” (Alatalo, T., Meier, J. and Frank, E., 2015, p. 155), and
therefore is characterized by combining the working methods and pedagogy of both systems. It is based on a holistic approach and perspective in which play and creativity are essential elements, helping the students to explore the world through different ways and preparing them for the first grade of primary school.

The Swedish curriculum for compulsory school lays expectations, both broad and specific, concerning the goals of preschool class. The aim of a preschool class in Sweden is to stimulate the children’s development and learning, while following and promoting the values of the Swedish society, such as democracy, respect, equality, solidarity and freedom (Skolverket, 2018). The preschool class should respect the children’s rights through a creative work and play and it should follow a programme based on the students’ needs and interests in combination with their previous knowledge and experience. However, it should create challenges where the children are inspired to learn and explore new knowledge. The educational programme of preschool class should ease the transition from preschool to compulsory school and school-age educare offering to the students “a variety of ways to work and express themselves and different learning environments” (Skolverket, 2018, p. 19). Therefore, preschool class should help the students to experience different learning environments and improve their learning development, preparing them for the continued education in the first grade of primary school.

2.2.1. The policy of preschool class: Curriculums and philosophies

The Swedish educational system is highly decentralized and comprises three curricula, one for the preschool, a second for the compulsory school and a third for the upper-secondary school. They are connected by sharing a view of knowledge, development and learning based on lifelong learning (Ministry of Education and Research, 1999). The parliament and the government set out goals and guidelines through the Education Act and the three national curriculums. Moreover, the municipalities and independent education providers are responsible for organizing the education within the established framework. To make sure that guidelines are implemented, the NAE (The Swedish National Agency for Education) and Swedish Schools Inspectorate supervises, supports
and follows up to improve quality and outcomes. The curriculum transfers to the teachers the entire responsibility for choosing and developing methods to achieve the goals (Skolverket, 2011). In order to accomplish this organization, cooperation between Early Childhood Education and Care - settings, compulsory schools and recreation centers are required (Ministry of Education and Research, 2016).

Compulsory school is comprised of four stages: förskoleklass or preschool class (ages 6-7, grade F), lågstadiet (ages 7-9, grades 1-3), mellanstadiet (ages 10-12, grades 4-6) and högstadiet (ages 13-16, grades 7-9). Lågstadiet and mellanstadiet are the two stages of primary school and högstadiet is the lower stage of secondary school. The compulsory school curriculum discusses the preschool class in three sections of the text: the first chapter of the curriculum focuses on the values of the National school system; the second chapter on the goals and guidelines that all levels of schooling in the compulsory system should strive for; and in the third chapter, which was created in July 2016, specific guidelines concerning the purpose and content of the preschool class are described. The curriculum for compulsory school states that preschool class provides 6-year-old children the chance to take part in “preparatory but gentle, playful and joyful meetings that meet the requirements of the school in terms of skills and knowledge” (Ministry of Education and Research 2008, p. 244).

In the chapters from above, it is mentioned that the aim of the preschool class is to stimulate the development of the children’s learning, through which play and creativity are essential components (Alatalo, 2015). Moreover, “the educational programme for preschool class should contribute to the continuity and progression of the pupils’ development and learning as well as prepare the pupils for continued education” (Skolverket, 2018, p. 19), offering them a variety of working methods and teaching environments in order to ease the transition from preschool into compulsory school. According to the curriculum, the task of the Swedish school should be to respect and encourage all the students to find out their own uniqueness as individuals. It should be based in a democratic environment that imparts and transmits respect for human rights and the fundamental democratic values of the Swedish society as “the inviolability of human life,
individual freedom and integrity, the equal value of all people, equality between women and men and solidarity between people” (Skolverket, 2018, p. 5).

Moreover, the curriculum also lays out a set of goals and guidelines that specify the orientation of work in the preschool class, but these goals are meant to be strived towards and not necessarily reached, as primary school expects. This exception within the compulsory curriculum restates the intention of preschool class to include and fusion elements of both preschool and school in order to create a bridge between the two stages (Willder & Lillvist, 2017). The teachers of preschool class are responsible for ensuring that pupils acquire and develop the necessary knowledge for each individual and the whole class, as members of society, that will also “provide a basis for further education” (Skolverket, 2018, p. 11).

In regard to the educational positioning of the preschool class, different studies have shown that the preschool class is influenced both by the preschool with a social pedagogical position and by the primary school with an academic school readiness position, preparing children for further schooling (Ackesjö & Persson, 2016). Researchers have described the Social Pedagogy approach as the Nordic model for organising Early Childhood Education which contains fundamental characteristics as child centered and the use of experiential learning and stresses social development rather than formal instruction (Ackesjö & Persson, 2016). The expectation for the preschool class is that it creates a new educational approach, relating the different curricula and mixing both pedagogical approaches from preschool and primary school (Skolverket, 2014a). The teachers in preschool class, thus, have to orient themselves in relation to these two curricular frameworks: a social pedagogic role and a more academic role in preparing children for school. However, the position of preschool class has also been described as being ambivalent in relation to preschool and school, which creates tension for teachers to deal with (Ackesjö & Persson, 2016). It has been noticed that some teachers in preschool class present difficulties “in identifying their role and formulating their mission in relation to preschool and school” (2016, p. 183), creating ambivalence in the teaching role of the preschool class teachers that affects the task of the preschool class. This uncertainty about the preschool class role creates different
teachers’ interpretations of the preschool class mission, manifested by the fact that there are variations in the way of teaching conducted in preschool class, difficulting the achievement of an equivalence in preschool class teaching at the Swedish national level.

Despite the fact that there are distinct expectations for the preschool class, there is a notable absence of training specific for preschool class in the Swedish teacher training system. Teachers training to become a preschool teacher is different than the training for a preschool class and primary school teacher. There is a bachelor for Preschool teachers, a bachelor for F-3 of compulsory school and another bachelor for 4-6 years of compulsory school. Consequently, teachers from Preschool class and grades 1-3 of primary school have the same training, and there is no preschool class-specific training for teachers to learn how to combine the different pedagogical expectations unique to the preschool class. This appears to be having consequences for preschool class practice, as different studies have shown that preschool class teachers described a lack of clarity in policy directions, where they are supposed to define the mission of the preschool class by themselves (Ackesjö & Persson, 2016).

2.3. Difficulties in the transition from preschool to primary school

While internationally there is increased recognition of the importance of supporting children’s transition into school to facilitate learning continuity, “preschool class, as it is designed in Sweden, does not exist in almost any other country” (Atalo, 2016, p. 156). Preschool class, when managed by collaborative, cooperative and well prepared staff, enhances the probability that the positive impacts of early childhood education will last through primary school and beyond (OECD, 2017). Nevertheless, the transition from preschool to primary school is a big step for most children and comprehensive knowledge of what policies and practices are needed for successful transitions is still lacking (OECD, 2017). Filling these gaps is important for designing policies that are coherent, equitable and sustainable for the early years of education.
In many countries, political and social attention on early learning and its transitions has increased over the past decade. It has been acknowledged by many researchers and educators around the world “the importance of children’s transition to school, both as a significant life event and as a factor in future engagement with education” (Huser, C., Dockett, S. & Perry, B., 2016, p. 439). However, according to a support material from the NAE on the preschool class (Skolverket, 2014b), it can be difficult to establish a good collaboration between the preschool class and compulsory school as a result of not having enough time for exchanges of experiences, reflection, follow-up and evaluation. The differences between early childhood education in the preschool and primary school have been highlighted by many researchers and educators. There are different governance structures professional requirements and conditions of employment for educators (Neuman, 2002). Additionally, the report from Swedish Schools Inspectorate states that even working teams are often being formed, there is still a lack of pedagogical cooperation between them, which may complicate the work with the progression of pupils (2015:03) (Ministry of Education and Research, 2016) and this lack of cooperation has emerged as an obstacle during the transition process (Alatalo, 2016, p. 162).

A gap in the literature exists concerning how to facilitate a successful transition between between prior-to-school and school education in Sweden has been described. Recognizing this gap, Starting Strong reports (OECD, 2001, 2006) urge that attention should be given to transition challenges that affect children and teachers, and “there should be a greater focus on building bridges across administrative departments, staff-training, regulations and curricula in both systems” (2006, p. 59). Creating bridges between the two stages can promote connections and provide support to guide the passage. Supporting transitions is a shared responsibility, so there is a need of families, preschool teachers, preschool heads, primary teachers and principals to work together to achieve greater levels of coordination and communication. Also, in Starting Strong V it is mentioned that even though the topic of transition is getting more attention and research is increasing, there are still challenges remaining (OECD, 2017, p. 66).
Although there is a broad amount of research that argues for the importance and need of communicating and transferring information between preschools and primary schools, there is little literature concerning on what exactly should be transferred, how and when this should happen, with almost no evidence of joint transition strategies (O’Kane, 2016). The teachers in preschool-class have to orient themselves in relation to a social pedagogical role from preschool and a more academic role in preparing children for school, however, few studies have been created with a specific focus on analysing and understanding the content and policy of the teaching in the preschool-class (Ackesjö, Persson, 2016). Also, the ambiguity of the goals of preschool class and the lack of clarity and uncertainty in policy directions of preschool-class teachers provoke an unclear position of the preschool-class in relation to the other school forms (Ackesjö & Persson, 2016). The preschool-class may be regarded as what Ackesjö (2010) has termed as a borderland practice, located at the border of two school forms, each of them with a clear pedagogical tradition, but that “cannot be characterised as either school or preschool” (Ackesjö & Persson, 2016, p. 184). Consequently, there is an important need for research because even though there are some articles and studies, further investigations are required to have a greater level of understanding about what happens during the transition between preschool and compulsory school and how primary schools use information transferred by preschools (O’Kane, 2016). The empirical research that I will develop can contribute meaningfully to document teachers’ understandings and perspectives of the transition and their implementation in their teaching practices, helping to provide knowledge in order to improve transitions in the educational system in Sweden.

3. Research Aims / Questions

3.1. Research aims

Despite the fact that the Swedish National Agency for Education (Skolverket) has included and revised a section about preschool class in the primary school curriculum, and a number of studies
arguing the need for cooperation between the different educational settings, there is a lack of understanding about the content and policy of the teaching in the preschool-class (Ackesjö, Persson, 2016). The aim of this research is to characterize how the transition from preschool to school is perceived and negotiated by different teachers (the term “teachers” is used in the remainder of the text to refer to the preschool, preschool class and primary teachers) involved in the transition process, as well as how a teacher implements the transition process in her teaching practices in a Swedish preschool class and how mandatory attendance in preschool class can affect or change their understandings of preschool class. An empirical study will be conducted, studying the transition within a school in southern Sweden.

3.2. Research questions

- How is the transition conceptualized or understood by those responsible for supporting or facilitating the transition?
- What teaching practices do stakeholders implement in order to facilitate this transition?
- What are the challenges that stakeholders experience supporting this transition?

4. Methods

The present empirical research was conducted using a combination of semi-structured interviews and observations in a preschool class in order to learn and study the understanding of the participants about if and how preschool class supports the transition from preschool to primary school in Sweden. These methods were used to document the practices that teachers developed to facilitate successful transitions for the children practices, and how the preschool class is conceived of by the teachers. In order to analyse the teachers’ perspectives on the transition and how this transition affects the different teachers and children, concepts of educational transitions previously explained in the background were used as an analytic framework to interpret the data: Van Gennep’s (1909) conception of transition in three phases (preliminal rites (rites of separation), liminal rites (rites of transition) and postliminal rites (rites of incorporation)); Fabian
and Dunlop’s (2007) conception of educational transition as a process of changes in the settings and relationships that children experience from one to another phase of education; and the transitional education seen from an ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) in which preschool, preschool class, school, parents, home are part of the different systems (microsystems, mesosystems and macrosystems) in which children live different experiences during their early years of education.

4.1. Field site

The study was conducted in a municipal compulsory school in a small town in southern Sweden. The town has approximately 2500 citizens and the school where the research was conducted is the only one in the town. The school encompasses all the grades of compulsory school F-9: preschool class, primary school (lågstadiet and mellanstadiet) and lower secondary school (högstadiet). The school is organized in two buildings, one for F-6 grades and another one for grades 7-9. In total, there are almost 500 students; 250 students in grades F-6 divided by 12 classes. All the classes of F-6 are located in the same building and share a corridor. There are two preschool classes with one teacher each and a total of 39 students (20 and 19 students in each preschool class), and two classes for first grade of primary school with three teachers and one assistant working with 30 students (15 in each class).

Furthermore, there is a preschool located 500 meters away from the F-9 school, which most of the children attend before entering the compulsory school. This preschool, where I also conducted some part of my research, consists of four classrooms. Two classes with children 1-3 years and two other classes with children 3-5 years. Therefore, the participants of this study were a teacher from one of the classes in preschool with 3 to 5-year-old children, a teacher from one of the preschool classes, the children of that preschool class and a teacher of one of the first-grade classes in compulsory school.
4.2. Participants

The study participants included a preschool teacher (Johanna), a preschool class teacher (Maria) and a first-grade primary teacher (Helen) from the field site described above. Also, 19 children 6-7 years from a preschool class were also participants of the study. The participants were recruited through personal connections with the preschool class teacher. Pseudonyms were used for the names of the participants and the location of the school.

Johanna studied 2.5 years for being a preschool teacher. She has been working since 1984 and will retire next year. She has spent 35 years working mostly with children from 3 to 5 years old. Moreover, while she has been working, she has studied short courses to gain more knowledge about specific subjects such as maths and physics. Maria studied 2 years of high school education as a child teacher and since has been working since 1989. She worked exclusively for 15 years, after which she combined working and part-time studies for 2 more years to complete her teaching degree. Since completing her studies, she has continued to work for the past 10 years. Helen’s education was in Lägstadielärare 1-3 (primary teacher grade 1-3) at university for 2.5 years. Even though she studied for teaching from first class to third class of primary school, she has been a teacher up to sixth grade. She began working in 1982, where she started with a first grade class and followed them through sixth grade.

4.3. Documentation Methods

Data collection consisted of individual, semi-structured interviews (Mukherji & Albon, 2015) of a preschool teacher, a preschool class teacher and a first grade primary school teacher, and also observations of daily routines in a preschool classroom. The interviews and observations took place over the course of two weeks.

Interviews. The interviews took place in each teacher’s private office in the school and preschool and they were conducted in English, which was the common language among the interviewer
and interviewees. Each teacher was interviewed once. Between each interview there was at least one day of difference. The interviews lasted an average of 60 minutes and they were audio recorded and transcribed by the author of this study. This type of semi-structured interviews include a mixture of both open and closed questions (Mukherji & Albon, 2015). An interview guide (see Appendix 1) was provided to the interviewees in advance to have an overall idea and it contained questions related to six general and broad themes. However, the student researcher had the freedom and flexibility to adapt the interview depending on each individual participant needs or level of understanding, changing the order of the questions, coming back to a previous theme if is needed, or spending more time in a specific topic (Fielding and Thomas, 2008). After the interviews took place, each interviewee gave a tour of the class to show the physical layout, the materials they were using, the environment of their daily activities and some documentation such as documents for following up on the child’s development, drawings, hand-written papers, etc. The children were not present during the tour in the preschool and first grade of primary school, but they were present in the preschool class in which the tour was given during the observations.

Observations. Qualitative observations were conducted in the preschool class in order to triangulate information with interview data concerning how the preschool class itself was organized to try and address issues related to children’s transitions. The participants of the observations were 19 children of 6 years, the preschool class teacher and her half part time assistant. This type of observations are often undertaken in “naturalistic” situations, in this case in the preschool class, where the researcher observed being guided by the aims of the research, and being aware at the same time of all the things that were happening. Since the beginning, the main preschool class teacher presented the student researcher to the children, explaining that she is a university student who is conducting research through interviews and observations in the school. The student researcher became a participant observer and the observations were documented by field notes. In the present case, participant observation involved the researcher spending three school days over the course of two weeks with a group and participating in some activities in the class, including taking on the role of a teacher’s assistant that helps the students
when they need; meanwhile, the staff team is fully aware that the researcher is undertaking observations and know the purpose of them (Mukherji & Albon, 2015). Therefore, through the observations that the student research did in the preschool class, the behavior and relationships of the participants (preschool class teacher and children from preschool class), as well as their routines and roles in the classroom were examined. The observations were used as a means of triangulating with the interview data, comparing and finding connections between them through the themes and patterns.

4.4. Analysis Methods

Thematic analysis was used to interpret the interview and observation data. Thematic analysis is one of the most common forms of analysis that examines patterns of meaning across the data obtained that are relevant to find and understand the answer to the research questions (Mukherji & Albon, 2015). Through the thematic analysis different patterns and themes were identified as a tool for characterizing the practices of the teachers in the classroom in the transition from preschool to primary school in Sweden. These patterns were also analysed concerning the teachers’ perspectives of the preschool class as a transition process and how the participants understand and implement this transition in their practices in the school. Therefore, in order to understand how preschool class works as a bridge between preschool and first grade of primary school and how it affects the different stakeholders, thematic analysis was guided by the different theories and definitions of transition in education, described previously in the background.

4.5. Ethical Guidelines

Before developing the study, classroom teachers were informed about the research, the aim of it and their expected role through participation. There were two different types of participants: the teachers as interviewees and the children being observed in daily preschool class activities. Prior to the interviews and observations, the teachers signed adult consent forms that gave the researcher permission to use their data. The preschool class teacher sent home with each student
a parental consent form, which parents signed to allow their children to participate in the classroom observations. The participants were informed that the research would be anonymous and pseudonymous would be used to protect the participants and the school. Also, they were informed that they would have the right to withdraw consent to participate in the study at any time, for whatever reason, without any consequences and that when the research study is done the data will be deleted.

4.6. Validity, Reliability, Generalizability of the Data

It must be mentioned that as a case study of one school with three teachers interviewed, the findings of this work are not generalizable. However, given the lack of information about what practices and policies are needed for achieving successful preschool-to-school transitions in Sweden (OECD, 2017), this small study can contribute to gain more knowledge about how the transition from preschool to primary school in Sweden is understood and implemented by teachers that are involved in the different stages of the transition process. This data can in turn provide the basis for developing larger scale studies to examine the problem to produce more generalizable findings.

5. Results

The aim of this study was to characterize the different teachers’ understandings and perspectives on the transition from preschool to primary school in their teaching practices in a school in the Southern of Sweden. The following themes related to teacher’s understandings and perspectives on the transition emerged in my analysis of the data: the teachers’ ideas of the transition from preschool to primary school, the teaching practices implemented by the teachers in order to facilitate the transition and the challenges that teachers experienced supporting the transition.
5. 1. The teachers’ ideas of the transition from preschool to primary school

A key point of consensus among all the teachers was that the most important part in education and for supporting children’s transitions is to show and share good values together with caring, and the rest about learning concepts will come later. In these three stages, the teachers are trying to give the children as much as they can, through taking care of them and transmitting them the values from the Swedish curriculum and society. They want the children to know how to act and behave with other people, showing respect to everyone. Teachers considered that care should be prioritized and then learning would instinctively follow.

On the one hand, the preschool teacher, Johanna, emphasized that in preschool, teachers are a little bit like moms. They saw their role in the preschool as mums, as someone that was there for the children and took care of their needs, different that in primary school, where the teachers gave the children more independence and space but they were still there for them in case of need. Johanna explained that in preschool they took the opportunity to teach things to the children but caring was always first, “if they don’t feel safe and comfortable they will not learn anything” (Johanna, 2019). So they gave more importance to the person, making sure to create a safe environment where the kids felt comfortable so they could be themselves, and then “the rest will come” (Johanna, 2019), that is, after the basic needs were met, children could then learn more school-oriented material and knowledge like Swedish literacy and mathematics.

On another hand, the preschool class teacher, Maria, said: “preschool class is to transition, we are supposed to take the best part of the preschool, and also prepare them for school” (Maria, 2019). According to Maria and to the observations made by the researcher, the preschool class provided a more structured school day than in preschool, but less structured than in first grade. The play time, the freedom and the breaks were more often in preschool and they were decreasing in preschool class and first grade. Opposite to this, the learning time, sitting on the chairs and having less breaks, free and play time were increasing in preschool class. In preschool the play and free time was one of the most important parts of the daily day. In preschool class play was
still important, because “the students still learn a lot while they are playing”, however, over the course of the year time for play was decreasing. The first semester of preschool class, during Autumn, was similar to preschool routine, the kids had shorter time seating, more free time and the work was easier, however, during the second semester, there was a progression of the work and preschool class became closer to the primary school routine, in which the work demanded much more sitting and less free time. So little by little, “children in preschool class have to learn how to sit more” (Maria, 2019).

On the other hand, first grade of primary school teacher, Helen, explained that there was still a transition happening in first grade. At the beginning of the year, during the first months, children could sit on the floor as they were doing in preschool class, on the carpet making a circle to talk about what they were going to do during the day, to eat the fruit, etc. but then during the second semester “children can't move like they used to do in preschool class, they sit on the bench so they were not so free anymore” (Helen, 2019). So, when children started first grade, teachers created an environment that was closer to the one in preschool class, they had more free time, more breaks so children could adapt little by little into the new methodology and way of doing, more fixed and structure, so even though the preschool class was created for the function of being a bridge between stages, at the beginning of first grade there was also a progression in the different educational practices.

5. 2. The teaching practices implemented by the teachers in order to facilitate the transition

In general, all the three interviewees agreed that their role as teachers was to try to give the children as much as they can, through taking care of them and transmitting them the values from the Swedish curriculum as respect, equality, democracy. They wanted the children to know and learn how to be and behave with other people, showing respect to everyone. They didn’t follow a specific pedagogy, however, they picked up from different ones, they tried to take the best of
different pedagogies, they think a lot about Vygotsky, his theory of the zone of proximal development and Piaget. They also agreed that team activities were helpful for the children transitions. Concretely, Maria, the preschool class teacher, mentioned that “children can learn a lot by helping each other and cooperating”. Additionally, the Swedish society and the principles in Sweden trust their teachers so teachers have a lot of freedom to decide their own way of working and methodology and they change and adapt their everyday activities according to the students’ needs. The entire pedagogical responsibility for choosing and developing methods focusing on goals to be strived forwards lies on the teachers (Skolverket, 2011). Maria, the preschool class teacher, answered in the interview “I can't say that we are planning a lot of activities to make children ready for school, but to make them ready for the life, and the things that they need to know about it, so they can have a good life”.

The rest of the data collected from the interviews related to the teaching practices that stakeholders implement in order to facilitate the transition from preschool to primary school has been divided in three following themes that are relevant to understand how the transition works. These themes are about meetings that the different teachers have, visits in different classrooms and transitions that occur during each stage.

**5.2.1. Meetings between teachers**

Broadly speaking, there was little face-to-face coordination among preschool and preschool class teachers. They only had two formal meetings each year, once during the Autumn semester and once during the Spring semester. In those meetings, they shared some information about the children, “but since teachers are not allowed to say anything specific or personal of the children, they can’t share almost nothing to us” (Maria, 2019). Only if the parents have written and signed a consent that they could, then the teachers can share more information, but the consent has to be required for a specific reason, in order to share information about the children that teachers are more worried about their development because they might have some needs or difficulties. So in the meetings between the preschool teachers and the preschool class teachers, they could only
share the type of activities they did in the class, the work they did and which ways or strategies they followed and the interests of the children. In this way teachers could learn the background experience and knowledge of the children and they didn’t need to work with what the children had already learned before. However, the teachers had to talk in general, they couldn’t talk specifically of any child “and that's maybe the information needed that helps us most” (Maria, 2019). Therefore they were not allowed to share individual and personal information about each child such as difficulties or needs they might have in some specific subjects, worries, problems or their cognitive development. Also, Johana, the preschool teacher, explained that years ago they used to have more meetings but now they don’t have the time for it and in her opinion two per year is not enough. Also, this year they just met once cause a big lack of time. Related to the other part of the transition, preschool class teachers just had one meeting at the start of the course with the first grade primary teachers according to the organizational expectations established by the principal. In the meeting the preschool class teachers talked about the pupils in general and first grade teachers wrote down some information, but apart from that there is nothing else they have to do. This emphasizes the lack of institutional support for helping the teachers manage the transitions, as well as how institutional rules negatively constrain what teachers are allowed to do to learn more about the children and help them through the transition.

5.2.2. Familiarization meetings

Besides the meetings between the teachers, visits were also organized in which the teachers visited the classrooms of children who would be their future students, and in which the children visited the classrooms they would join in the future.

On the one hand, preschool class teachers visited those children in preschool that would start the next course in preschool class, usually around April. They observed what the children had in preschool, they looked at what children were working with, which materials, which activities and the children wrote their names to tell the visitors in what they were interested in. Every child in preschool had a portfolio with the material that they had done and also some pictures from when
they had their birthday, trips, activities, etc. The children often sat and looked at this documentation, so during the visit of the preschool class teachers in preschool children showed it to them. The preschool class teachers explained them that next year they would move to another class with them and they would become their teachers. During the visit the preschool teachers were all the time there together with the preschool children and the preschool class teachers. Preschool teachers were the ones who decided that it was good for the children that preschool class teachers came to preschool in order to meet the kids in their own comfort zone in which they would feel safe. This visit in preschool consisted in building some basic interactions to create a familiar and comfortable environment where the children could get to know their new upcoming teachers while they were at home (preschool).

On the other hand, first grade primary teachers visited the students in preschool class to get to know them before they came to the upcoming year. They went to visit the preschool class children in Spring and then “We tell them that we will be with them next year and perhaps we will talk about if they draw something. So then I can know their favorite color, favorite animals, and how their family looks and so on. Then we meet them in August when they start the new course and it's not more than that” (Helen, 2019). So, some first and basic interactions and presentations between the first grade teachers and the children took place in their comfortable environment, the preschool class. Helen explained that a couple of years ago there used to be much more interaction between preschool class and first grade of primary school, they had days out together where children and teachers from both classes interacted and cooperated.

As for the students’ visits, after the preschool class teachers visited the preschool children in preschool, preschool children would then visit the preschool class. They came to visit the preschool class three times together with their teachers during April. First they came for one hour and they got a little worksheet and they played and got familiar with the surroundings. The second time had the same dynamic. And then the third time, they came to stay in preschool class for two hours and then they also stayed to have lunch with them. the first two times the interaction was just between the preschool children, preschool teachers and preschool class
teachers. However, the last time they visited the class, the preschool class children were also there in the class so they interacted with each other both preschool and preschool class children.

Furthermore, Maria, the preschool class teacher, explained that preschool class children also visited the first grade primary class as her own initiative because even though it's not compulsory to do it, she thought it would be good for the children. So, once a week she tried to go to one of the first grade classrooms when there is no one in that moment, together with the preschool class children to do some lessons there. She took the math book for example and had a lesson in the first grade classroom instead of having it in her own classroom. They sit on the bench, not on the carpet and children can see what does the new classroom look like. Maria heard that last year the first graders were so disappointed when they started the first grade because there were no toys, not so much time for playing as they used to have in preschool class, so they didn’t expect that big change because they thought that they were going to do the same in first grade than in preschool class. So after learning this, Maria tried to find some time to go to first grade classroom with her preschool class students and together they looked around and observed the differences and similarities between both classes so they can see how it looks like first grade and what they can expect for the upcoming year. “I think it's a good thing for them to get into the routines of first grade and know that this is what's going to come” (Maria, 2019), so she showed them the future situation and they practiced for a bit, but after she told them that they were not at that point yet, so they could come back and play in their classroom. This points out that some teachers, of their own initiative, are implementing activities that they believe will support the children’ transitions, being related to the different kinds of institutional structures as mesosystem (preschool, preschool class and primary school) and macrosystem (social and educational policies) that can enable or constrain how teachers think and act in relation to helping children with the transition (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).
5.2.3. Teacher-initiated changes to enact and support transitions during preschool class

Maria, the preschool class teacher, when she was asked about the different teaching practices to help the transition she commented that preschool class is a much more structured day than the preschool. However, at the same time, the play area and the free time is very important in preschool class, because the students learn a lot while they're playing. Then, she explained that preschool class as a bridge from preschool to primary school, contains different changes, dynamics, strategies and teaching practices in order to provide a progressional transition in which the kids feel comfortable and step by step they are getting more adapted to each situation. By this, it means than during preschool a development of the teaching practices was observed. In the autumn, in preschool class there was shorter time seating and the works were easier. But more and more, the students had to learn how to sit a little bit more. As mentioned before, once a week Maria brought her students to a first grade classroom where they used books, sit and worked. Thus, there was a progression in the work, at the beginning, children were used to the preschool routine so they demanded less seating and more moving, but in the course of the year, the teacher alternated the dynamic little by little, until they knew how to stay seated for longer periods of time, and the play time was still remaining but in less quantity. At the same time, the teacher adapted the day a day to the needs of the children, so depending on how much they needed to move or change the activities, the teacher flowed and combined some goals to strive together with the needs and interests of the children.

However, the transition and progression that occurs in the preschool year is not the only transition from preschool to primary school that the children live, in the first grade of primary school the transition is still happening. According to Maria, even the preschool class was created as the transition from preschool to primary school, the transition itself is not finished in preschool class (Maria, 2019). At the beginning of the first grade of primary school, the teacher organized the schedule taking into account that children come from preschool class, which had an environment really different with a lot of freedom and free time to play. So even though the
preschool class teacher was preparing the students for primary school, decreasing the free time and increasing the working time in a gradual way, in first grade they were still creating and evolving the day a day by adapting it to the children's needs through a gradual technique, because every child is different and has his own developmental process. Then, the first semester of first grade still remained in some aspects to the preschool class routine and progressively in the second semester the way of working achieved more distance from the preschool class methodology.

5.3. The challenges that teachers experience supporting the transition

Various kinds of challenges related to the organization of the transition from preschool to primary school were observed during the interviews with the three teachers and the observations of the preschool class. Variations on the number of adult-child ratio, lack of teachers and time for meetings, no specific guide of the preschool class curriculum, a lot of freedom, were some of the challenges observed that will be following exposed.

In Sweden, there is no specific recommendation for the number of adult-child ratios in preschool groups. The average group size is 16,9 children, with variations depending on each school (Skolverket, 2014). Related to the staff-child ratios, Sweden has one of the lowest in OECD countries (OECD, 2013), with an average ratio of 5,3 children per adult. However, as preschools are free to decide the groups creating flexible preschool groups, the number of children in each class can vary, which creates different conditions and affects the children’s learning and teaching. Maria, the preschool class teacher, was in charge of twenty children of 6-7 yo, three of them with special needs, showing a lack of staff and teachers to support her job in order to be able to cover all the needs of the children. Also, for some technical issues, the preschool class children and teacher had to move for some weeks to another classroom that had three additional rooms, with a lot of space and resources. Consequently, the lack of teachers in the preschool class became a challenge for the teacher who was not able to see and take care of all the kids at the same time. When the kids did different activities in different rooms at the same time, the teacher couldn’t be
aware of what was going on in the other room. The high ratio of children to teacher created difficulties in order to facilitate the transition, not having enough resources and not being able to provide enough attention to each child, affecting the teaching practices and children's learning. Also, Maria, the preschool class teacher herself had to embody the transition for the children. However, even more studies are needed to know the skills that a teacher must have in order to arrange the teaching practices in the different stages of transition, through the interview data it seems that an expertise of both preschool and grade school and a skilled improvised was expected from the preschool class teacher. Therefore, compared to the preschool and grade school teachers, preschool class teacher had “double” the material to keep in mind and work with.

On the other hand, the three teachers shared the same opinion in some aspects. There is not enough time designated for the meetings between teachers, “we meet sometimes in the evenings to discuss more because one hour for week is not enough” (Maria, 2019). Also, not being allowed to share specific information of the children is not useful and don’t make things easy, “we know very little of what they are doing in preschool class” (Helen, 2019). Authorizing this could help all the children in the transition because it would let the teachers to be more connected to each other so they would be aware of all the different needs, skills, process and development of each child in order to find the best strategies to facilitate the transition. Also, related to the changing law in the last Fall 2018, when preschool class became compulsory attendance for all children 6-7 yo, all three teachers agreed that it was “an excellent idea” (Maria, 2019) and a really beneficial change for the teachers in order to be able to follow more organization in the activities and the planning, knowing that they can count on all the students, understanding this in a more readiness for school approach, in which the children are living the rites of transition from preschool to the incorporation in the school. This change affects more particularly the preschool class and the first grade teacher because requires children to come everyday to preschool class and this facilitates the job of the teacher, being able to organize the activities based on the expectation that most if not all of the children will be present in the class. “It’s hard to have a class if the children are not there,” said Maria, considering the new
compulsory requirement as very beneficial for the organization of the preschool class (Maria, 2019). Also, even most of the children used to attend preschool class when it was not compulsory, 94% in 2004 (Engdahl, 2004), now being compulsory means that all the kids in first grade will have the previous experience and knowledge from preschool class.

When Maria, the preschool class teacher was asked about the role of the curriculum in the preschool class, she explained that they are supposed to do so many things according to the curriculum, like science, Swedish, maths, and “sometimes we feel like you can't squeeze all that in, because you want to have the free time, you want to have play time” (Maria, 2019), so you have to try to find the best way and technique to do everything. However, all are goals to strive and it is all involved in the daily basis, “we just squeeze it in when it makes sense for the children” (Maria, 2019). So preschool class teachers are not required to do certain lessons, it’s all about finding strategies to introduce the curriculum in the normal life, so having a huge background of experience in preschool class is needed. Moreover, the preschool class teacher commented that almost everything related to the planning in preschool class is completely up to the preschool class teachers, there is no specific guide part of the curriculum and there is so much freedom of how to do the classes, “but you kind of do it by heart” (Maria, 2019). Maria also commented that having the freedom to decide your own way of teaching can be really productive if the teacher has a lot of years of previous experience. However, if it is the case that a teacher just started the professional career, the freedom that teachers received could become a challenge; a lack of experience, no orientation and an entire responsibility for choosing the teaching practices could bring difficulties to the teachers in order to achieve a successful transition for the children (Skolverket, 2011). Therefore, the freedom could also create insecurity and a need to find something to follow because “there is a lot of hard work to do, so you need to have a lot in your spine to just take out, to improvise… to be ready for the up-comings of the children, because you will be alone a lot with a big group, and you have a lot to learn. So I don't think it's easy to do this job if you don't have like, 20 years in your backpack of preschool before” (Maria, 2019). As opposite of the preschool class teacher, Helen, the first grade primary teacher, explained that in the first grade of primary school curriculum the goals have to be
achieved and this creates a more fixed structure of teaching. Students have to learn a lot of specific knowledge so “it’s more boring nowadays than it was before because we are so fixed with that and we are not so free” (Helen, 2019).

6. Discussion

In what follows, I will consider the ideas, practices, and challenges discussed by the teachers in relation to children’s transitions through the lens of the concepts of transition presented earlier. The theories used include the Rites of passage (Van Gennep, 1909) with the description in three phases of the passages that a person experiences during life. The rites of separation (from home to preschool), the rites of transition (preschool class) and the rites of incorporation (to the school). Also, the ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) contributes to understand how the different stakeholders of the process of the transition, children, preschool, preschool class, school, parents and home affect the transition. Through an ecological system theory, the stakeholders are examined on the basis of different interrelated system levels, Microsystems (family and home), mesosystems (preschool, preschool class and school) and macrosystems (social policies) that impact on the different experiences that children live during their early years of education. The interactions of these ecological systems have an effect on the child's development and his successful on the transition from preschool to primary school.

Related to the teachers’ understandings of the transition from preschool to preschool in Sweden, some differences were analyzed between the teachers. The rites of passage (Van Gennep, 1909), separation, transition and incorporation, could be identified in the progression of the transition. In preschool, preschool teachers saw themselves in the role of mothers, care-takers, where they were focused on free time and play, creating comfortable, trusting and safe environments. In preschool, the first part of the transition, the rite of separation is observed, children are separated from home and during this stage the most important step is “to be a good friend and person to become a citizen of the world” (Johana, 2019), if this is covered, after the learning can take
place. However, in preschool class the days are more structured than in preschool but less than in first grade. In preschool class, teachers “take the best part of the preschool, and also prepare the children for school” (Maria, 2019). Therefore, the play time, the freedom and the amount of breaks are decreasing when we move forward from preschool and the learning and sitting time are increasing as close as we get to incorporate to primary school, making more apparent the rite of transition from one stage to another. Also, the transition is not finished in preschool class; at the beginning of first grade there is still a progression and the dynamics are similar to the way of learning of preschool class, identifying the rites of incorporation, but this similarity of teaching practices between preschool class and primary school will decrease step by step, gradually, letting the children adapt to the new practice (Helen, 2019). These different rites of passage are not fixed, they can overlap each other depending on each child's development and needs. As a result of the freedom and flexibility of the teachers in choosing the adequate educational methodologies for the successful transition of the children, the intersection of the three rites of separation, transition and incorporation in all the three classrooms is negotiated by the teachers in the way that teaching practices will be modified or adapted to each necessity or need of each individual child and of the group class.

Related to the teaching practices implemented by the three teachers, through the observations, documentation was observed as being an important strategy of the preschool class. The teacher followed the methodology facts - field site - documentation, where the teachers and children together learn, share and listen, they live the experience and they write about it. The documentation was hanging around the class and it helped the children to feel part of the class, creating a feeling of belonging and being at home with their stuff, which could be understood or analyzed as the rite of separation from preschool, where everything is more similar to home, to preschool class.

As noted, a lack of specific pedagogy in the classrooms was observed. The teachers’ freedom to decide and choose the ways of doing bring them to pick up from the best methodologies. However, this freedom and flexibility to decide is an advantage for the teachers with a huge
background of experiences, but not for the inexperienced teachers that can feel lost and consequently not being able to know what to do, being forced to be autodidact and look to other pedagogies on internet (Maria, 2019). Therefore, teachers base their teaching practices and methodologies on their own tried and tested experience, affecting in some ways in the dynamics of the class and the successful transition of the children (Ackesjö & Persson, 2016) In the ecological system model, the teaching practices are developed according to the different adaptations that teachers have to make in a mesosystem level across the different stages, and the institutional constraints teachers are under, like the expectations that teachers are given with the responsibility for pedagogical activities in a macrosystem level by way of the Swedish National Agency for Education and the attending curricular and steering documents.

An interesting argument from the preschool class teacher was made when she was asked about her teaching practices in order to facilitate the transition: “I can't say that we are planning a lot of activities to make children ready for school, but to make them ready for the life, and the things that they need to know about it, so they can have a good life” (Maria, 2019), in which it’s apparent the importance that they give to the basic values to become a good person and citizen, the base of everything, not looking just to the next step but looking to the life in general. Teachers shared a theory and belief about children’s learning and development, that care and sharing good values should be a priority and take precedence to the learning of knowledge because they underpin cognitive development. Teachers used their own ideas about children’s learning and development as a guide to establish their teaching practices to support the children’s different rites of transition, focusing on care to facilitate the adaptation to each stage.

In what follows, I examine the challenges that the teachers experienced during and about the transition through the conceptual lens I have introduced. The different meetings between the teachers were mentioned several times by the interviewees as ways of communicating in the transition. All the teachers agreed that the amount of meetings between teachers is totally not enough, but apart from the lack of time, another big disadvantage is that teachers are not allowed to share any specific and detailed information of any student “and that's maybe the information
needed that helps us most” (Maria, 2019). It was a really surprising fact of the research because it seems important to share information and documentation of each child in order to facilitate the transition from preschool to primary school. This fact seems contradictory to the description of the preschool class as a link and bridge between the two curriculum traditions (Ackesjö, 2013). Sharing knowledge would give the opportunity of creating networks of dialogue and would provide the chance to exchange points of view and experiences that might help the development of the children and as a consequence the improvement of the transition. However, the reason that causes these institutional constraints reminds still unclear. From an ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), in a macro level it is observed that teachers experience some problems during the transition, dealing with regulations and expectations from social and institutional policies that limit the teaching practices to facilitate the transition of the children from preschool to primary school.

Another relevant theme collected from the data in the interviews were the classroom visits. The different visits between teachers, children and rooms can be understood and analysed by the ecological perspective of Bronfenbrenner, using the various levels of microsystem, mesosystem, macrosystem, chronosystem and exosystem to interconnect the three stages in the transition. The visits consisted in building some basic interactions at the mesosystem level between the children and the teachers to create the perfect familiar and comfortable environment where the children could get to know their new upcoming teachers while they were still in their current classroom with their current teachers, and after they would visit the new class, in order to lose the fear of changing the building and get more comfortable with the new situation. However, the preschool class children visited the first grade class by an initiative of Maria, the preschool class teacher, once she learnt that the children were missing a lot the routine of preschool class, being surprised of the lack of toys and free time in primary school. This shows a big utility of the freedom that preschool class teachers have, being able to adapt their strategies depending on the needs of the children. Although, the preschool class teacher wouldn’t have known of the children’s thoughts if she wouldn’t have communicated with the first grade teacher. An interesting perspective related to meetings between teachers and classrooms visits have been pointed out, the importance of the
constant communication and sharing knowledge and information to facilitate and improve the transition of the children from preschool to primary school. Maria adapted her teaching practices and strategies to the local circumstances, trying to overlap the rites of transition and incorporation of Van Gennep, “having to orient herself in relation to a social pedagogical role in preschool class and a more academic role in preparing children for school” (Ackesjö & Persson, 2016, p. 182).

Another important finding to analyze are the internal transitions in each course. The transition from preschool to primary school also includes transitions in each stage, observed in the different changes between first and second semester and demonstrating the overlap of the different rites of transition (Van Gennep, 1909), being adjustable to each child's needs. Even though preschool class was created for the function of being a bridge between stages and the preschool class teacher was preparing the students for primary school, at the beginning of first grade there is still a transition, the rites of incorporation, and a progression in the different ways of doing and educational practices used in the class is being developed. So, the teachers adapt their day by day to the children’s needs in order to facilitate the transition between different stages. Teachers take into account the background and previous experiences of the children and they increase and decrease the amount of time using specific methods, and evolve their ways of working to achieve gradually the best for the children in the transition from preschool to primary school (Ackesjö, 2010).

Related to the changing law in the last Fall 2018, when preschool class became compulsory attendance for all children 6-7 yo, all three teachers agreed that it was a really beneficial change in order for the teachers to be able to follow more organization in the activities and the planning, knowing that they can count on all the students, understanding this in a more readiness for school approach, in which the children are living the rites of transition from preschool to the incorporation in the school. Moreover, another important challenge that the teachers had to deal with was the lack of staff in each class. The high ratio of children to teacher created difficulties in order to facilitate the transition, not having enough resources and not being able to provide
enough attention to each child. Also, Maria, the preschool class teacher herself had to embody the transition for the children. However, even more studies are needed to know the skills that a teacher must have in order to arrange the teaching practices in the different stages of transition, through the interview data it seems that an expertise of both preschool and grade school teachers and a skilled improvised was expected from the preschool class. Therefore, compared to the preschool and grade school teachers, preschool class teacher had “double” the material to keep in mind and work with. At the same time, the freedom that teachers received could also be a challenge, a lack of experience and no orientation and an entire responsibility for choosing the teaching practices could bring difficulties to the teachers in order to achieve a successful transition for the children (Skolverket, 2011).

7. Conclusion

This study aimed to develop knowledge about the preschool class in Sweden and to learn the different teachers’ understandings on the transition from preschool to primary school in their teaching practices. This study found that all teachers agreed in considering the last change in the Educational law the last Fall 2018, making the preschool class compulsory for all children, a very beneficial reform for the transition from preschool to primary school, improving the children’s education and development. The teachers commented that after this change, there was more organization and structure in preschool class because children attended school every day, so continuity to develop more knowledge was facilitated by this change, becoming preschool class to more focused on further academic practices, getting closer to a more school readiness approach (Ackesjö & Persson, 2016). However, the study found a big lack of staff in preschool class, having a high ratio of 20 students for teacher. This created difficulties in order to facilitate the transition, not having enough resources and not being able to provide enough attention to each child, taking into account their needs. When it comes to a more readiness to school, having a high ratio might be different because it is about more sitting and listening, but related to a more
freedom approach in which the children have a voice and are part of the decisions, there is a need for more staff to manage the different educational situations.

Although a much freedom and trust is given to teachers was observed, as well as no specific pedagogy in the school, pointing out the idea of considering some type of control or adaptation according to each teacher and background in order to facilitate the transition and create a balance between the different teaching practices and its effects on children's development. Teachers adapted their teaching practices to the specific circumstances and needs, having to orient themselves in the rites of separation, transition and incorporation (Ackesjö & Persson, 2016).

Moreover, a surprising fact was found learning that teachers do not follow up the old children that used to be in preschool or preschool class and now are in preschool class or first grade of primary school. Once the children move on to the next stage, there is no compulsory check-in to know how is it going for the students in the new class. Then, even the students are still being in the transition, a lack of connection and communication between old students and next year it has been shown, as well as a lack of pedagogical cooperation between teachers, being this an obstacle in order to facilitate a successful transition of the children (Alatalo, 2016).

Another important fact that the study found was the handicap with not being allowed to share the documentation between teachers in order to learn specific knowledge of each child. This conditioned the teachers to get the information that they needed more to help the students in the transition (Maria, 2019). Furthermore, a lack of meetings between teachers was observed and commented by the interviewees, expressing their wish of having more time scheduled to get in touch with the other teachers in order to create more interconnections and have more communication during the transition.

It should be noted that the present study had its limitations. This study was a small-case study, conducted in a small town in the Southern of Sweden. Three semi-structured interviews were conducted to three female Swedish teachers, a preschool teacher, a preschool class teacher and a
first grade of primary school teacher. In all the school F-6 the stuff was mostly female, there were just one main male teacher and two male assistants. This was an interesting fact and also a kind of limitation to get mix perspectives in the interviews about the transition due the lack of male teachers. The preschool teacher was working in the preschool closest to the compulsory school, where the other two teachers were working. Due to some problems in the direction of the school, it was not possible to interview the principal to examine more specifically how his role can affect or modify the different teaching practices. The language of the interviews was English, being the common language of everyone, although it was not the mother tongue of any of the participants so even though they were fluent, some presented less confidence when answering some questions cause the language.

Observations were also developed in the preschool class. This kind of study was conducted in order to learn the teachers’ understandings and perspectives in their teaching practices on the Swedish transition from preschool to primary school. However, this study doesn’t show the opinion of the majority of teachers from Sweden because the study is too small to generalize the findings to the Swedish preschool class context. Nevertheless, even though research about the transition from preschool to primary school has been done in many countries, showing an increased attention and interest on early childhood education, in Sweden there is a lack of knowledge about what practices are needed for facilitating the transition from preschool to primary school (OECD, 2017), and that is why this study has been developed, to contribute even in a small scale in the improvement and research of the transition from preschool to primary school in Sweden, analyzing the teaching practices to facilitate the educational changes.

Considering both the study findings and it’s limitations, we should also take into account future directions suggested by this research. While analyzing the data collected from the interviews and observations and the previous literature and research, a need to study the role of the principal in the transition from preschool to primary school has been observed. During the interviews developed, and examining and analyzing the findings, a lack of information and understanding of the making decisions by the principal that affect the teaching practices of the teachers in the
transition was noticed as indispensable. Also, research about the unlimited freedom that the teachers have should be done to learn the advantages and difficulties of it and how it might affect the teaching practices during the transition.

Future extended and deeper research on the role that documentation plays in the transition from preschool to primary school in Sweden should be done, examining a possible relation between the lack of time for communication between teachers and the small amount and generic documentation allowed to share about the children's development. This would contribute to have a better understanding of the politics in the Swedish educational context and its consequences and influence on the transition from preschool to primary school.

8. References


9. Appendix

Appendix 1: Interview guide for the interviewees

The preschool class in Sweden: A transition from preschool to primary school

1. Teacher Background
   a. Training, education and experience
2. The transition from preschool to primary school
   a. Describe a typical day in your class.
   b. What kind of activities do you do in order to help the children with the transition?
3. Cooperation between stages
   a. How do preschool teachers, preschool class teachers and first grade primary teachers collaborate with each other in order to support children with the transition?
4. Families
   a. Could you describe the parent involvement in your class.
   b. Are the parents involved in ways that support the transition? If yes how?

5. Planning / Organization/ Curriculum
   a. Give me some examples of how do you work with the curriculum in your daily activities.
   b. Describe any planning activities that you use to organize your work with the children.

Appendix 2: Adult consent to participate in Student Research

Adult Consent to Participate in Student Research
International Master’s Program in Swedish Preschool Education (Educare)
Spring 2019

Janona Bagué Grifoll 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 Swedish preschool class as the transition from preschool to first grade of primary school.

Janona Bagué Grifoll 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 Janona Bagué Grifoll (janonabague@gmail.com) 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: ________________________________
Appendix 3: Child consent to participate in Student Research

Child Consent to Participate in Student Research
International Master's Program in Swedish Preschool Education (Educare)
Spring 2019

Janona Bagué Grifoll 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 Swedish preschool class as the transition from preschool to first grade of primary school.

Janona Bagué Grifoll 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 International Master’s Program in Swedish Preschool Education in the School of Education and Communication at Jönköping University.

If you agree to allow your child to participate in this study, your child will be involved in one or more of the following research activities on preschool premises:

____ Being observed by the student researchers engaging in daily preschool activities.
____ Interacting with the student researchers in daily preschool activities.

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

You have the right to withdraw your consent for your child 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 Janona Bagué Grifoll (janonabague@gmail.com) and/or the course leader and master’s program director, Robert Lecusay (robert.lecusay@ju.se).

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

Parent/Caretaker’s contact number and/or email: ____________________________________________

Date: ____________________________________________

Child Participant’s Name (printed): ____________________________________________