

## Construction of Citizenship at Swedish Preschools

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### Abstract

*The purpose of my research is to make visible, highlight and illuminate preschool teachers' perception of what abilities they perceive children have possibilities to develop during their stay at preschools. Theories of citizenship are used as a theoretical framework. The research was conducted by using a questionnaire that was sent out to 13 local municipalities in the region of Norrbotten in the north of Sweden. Five in-depth interviews were also held. The results from the questionnaire showed an overall positive response from the respondents to almost all of the statements presented in the questionnaire. The positive responses that the preschool teachers and other staff gave to most of the statements in the questionnaire will be an important platform of knowledge for the development of active citizenship, although these positive responses still need to be critically analyzed and further investigated. The results from the in-depth interviews gave, in some parts, the same results as the questionnaire did. However, in the interviews, some critical aspects were highlighted such as: preschool teachers' lacking time for the pedagogical mission stated in the curriculum; larger groups of children enrolled in the preschools can develop stress among children; and, finally, difficulties to get replacement staff to some preschools, which can be perceived as stressful by ordinary staff. Based on the research results, it is argued that children enrolled in Swedish preschools have the possibilities to develop as active citizens, and consequently develop active citizenship. However, a critical factor is the tendencies of the amount of larger groups of enrolled children in preschools, which, in turn, can delay the possibilities for the children to negotiate their citizenship on a daily basis.*

**Keywords:** Citizenship, Early childhood, Children's abilities, Preschool, Curriculum

### Introduction

In this study, insights from research that have sought to deepen the perception of preschool teachers about the possible competences and skills that enrolled children aged 1–5 years develop during their visits to preschools are presented.

From the result of this research, it is argued that children enrolled in Swedish preschools have possibilities to develop as active citizens. Furthermore, we are witnessing a shift in curriculum theory with the child as a co-creator, and this requires another approach from the preschool teachers because children more or less construct their citizenship on a daily basis.

The concept of preschools, its connection to the Education Act, and the preschool curriculum are presented in the first part of the paper. The theoretical framework for citizenship and the methods used are described in the following next two sections. The research is presented in the fifth part, and finally in the last part, the findings of the research are discussed and analyzed.

### The Swedish preschool

The school system in Sweden includes preschool class, compulsory school, upper secondary school, and adult education. The Ministry of Education and Science is responsible for the educational system from preschool to university. The school system in Sweden is goal-based with a high degree of local government responsibility.

In Sweden, attendance at school is compulsory for all children aged 7–16 years. Before their attendance at school, most children in Sweden stay at preschools. Preschool can be described as an educational group activity for children from the age of 1 until they start school. It is a separate school form and its activities are regarded as education and teaching.

Most often teaching takes place under the supervision of preschool teachers, but there may also be other staff to promote the child's development and learning. Preschool teachers have a university degree and other daycare attendants most often have a high-school degree. Worth to notice is that only one percent of the staff at the preschools is males and that it has been like that since the preschools were established in Sweden in 1975.

The Education Act (2010:800) state that municipalities are required to provide preschool activities and child care for children aged 1–12 years. As of 2013, there are more than 470,000 children enrolled in preschools. Almost 96% of children aged 3–5 years attend preschools (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2012; 2011). One of the many goals of preschools is to provide children with good pedagogical activities; the preschool should be enjoyable, secure, and rich in providing learning opportunities for all children enrolled. Moreover, the children should be able to express themselves in different ways, both on their own and together with others in activities such a song and music, art, dance, drama, speech and writing.

The staff of the preschool plans pedagogical activities that enable children to create, learn, and explore. Creating a secure environment for both children and parents is one of the most important tasks of the preschool. The Education Act (2010:800) and the Curriculum for the Preschool Lpfö98 regulate the preschools in Sweden (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2010).

The Education Act states that the grouping of children should have an appropriate composition and size, and that the preschool premises should be fit for the purpose. However, the National Agency for Education has decided to abandon the earlier recommendation that there should be about 15 children in a preschool group. In the new general guidelines, it is instead the children's need to decide how large a group of children should be and how much staff is needed. The assessment will be based on a child impact assessment and based on factors such as staff education, facilities, environment, how group is composed of social, ethnic, and age and gender. There should be preschool teachers and other staff with the education or experience necessary to support the child's development and learning. Furthermore, the curriculum states that the premises and equipment should be available so that the aim of the preschool can be fulfilled.

The Curriculum for the Preschool Lpfö 98 (2010) stipulates that democracy forms the foundation of the preschool. The overall tasks of the preschool are to lay the foundations for lifelong learning. Essentially this involves the school staff creating an open and democratic climate where all children can experience both their own intrinsic value and that of others. The curriculum states that adults should give children support in developing trust and self-confidence, and that the children's curiosity, initiative, and interest should be encouraged and their will and desire to learn be stimulated. Language development of the child is an important area in the preschool. It is stated in the curriculum that children should have the opportunity developing their cultural identity and that the preschool should ensure that children with a mother tongue other than Swedish, receive the opportunity of developing both their Swedish language and their mother tongue.

The curriculum for the Preschool Lpfö 98 (2010) further stipulates that: "The preschool should be a living social and cultural environment that stimulates children into taking initiative and developing their social and communicative competence" (p. 5). Children are described as individuals with skills and competence that can be the starting point for everyday activities in the preschool setting.

In the Curriculum for the Preschool Lpfö 98 (2010), it is argued that play is important for the child's development and learning. The staff should take into account the child's views, interests and experiences when planning their daily work. The curriculum states that play and enjoyment in learning in all its various forms stimulate the imagination, insights, communication skills, and ability to think symbolically as well as cooperate and solve problems. In the curriculum, it is expressed that children search for knowledge and can develop it through play, social interaction, exploration, and creativity, as well as through observation, discussion, and reflection.

The task for the preschool is expressed as to focus on and strengthen the child's interest in learning and capturing new experiences. All girls and boys should have the same opportunities to develop without limits. Furthermore, the preschool should support the children in developing confidence in their own ability to think, act, move, and learn. In the Curriculum for the Preschool Lpfö 98 (2010), more explicit guidelines on the preschool teacher's responsibility have been developed and expressed. It is stated therein that the preschool teacher's responsibility is to provide children with opportunities for learning and development, and, at the same time, encourage them to use the whole range of their abilities.

The aim of the curriculum is to ensure that all children attend an equally good preschool, irrespective of where they live. One of the parts of the Curriculum for the Preschool Lpfö 98 (2010) describes the preschools rules; however, it is clearly stated that “... / the parents are responsible for their children’s development and for fostering them” (p.13). The rule of the preschools is to supplement the home by creating the best conditions for each child to develop rich and varied” (p. 13). More concretely, this means that the preschool teacher is responsible for ensuring that parents are given opportunities to participate in activities and exert influence over the goals embodied in the educational planning. This can be done by the team considering the parents’ views on planning and implementation of activities and ongoing conversations with the children’s legal guardians on children’s well-being, development, and learning.

Almost eight years ago, in 2006, the EU adopted the European Framework of Key Competences, a reference tool to help Member States to adapt their school curricula to modern needs. In the framework, the following eight key competences were identified: communication in the mother tongue and in foreign languages, mathematical competence, digital competence, learning to learn, social and civic competences, sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, and cultural awareness and expression (European Commission - Education, 2012). The conditions that the preschool should strive to ensure for each child are in line with the overall key competences developed by the European Commission.

The UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child, which states that children have the right to be consulted in matters directly concerning them, is another broad global push for children to be treated as active participants in the society, rather than as passive recipients and targets of adult decisions and interventions (Sheridan & Pramling Samuelsson, 200;Nichols, 2007). The premise for the work of child participation is the understanding of the child as an active agent and as a citizen entitled to have rights to participate in their lives (Theobald & Kultti, 2012;Mayall, 2002;James & Prout, 1997). Several key debates have emerged from interpretations of the convention, including the extent to which young children are viewed as citizens capable of actively participating in their lives as having an opinion on matters that affect their lives (Ainwood, Browniee, Walker, Cobb-Moore, Boulton-Lewis, Johansson and Wainman, 2011). It is further argued that children’s ideas, opinions, and influence are worthy of consideration and their social relationships worthy of study in their own right (Theobald & Kultti, 2012). In the study by Broström (2012), it is claimed that in preschool, this is seen when the child uses his/her legal rights to be seen and heard, to participate, and to influence, as promised in the Convention on the Rights of the Child of the United Nations. In practice, this means that preschool teachers have to listen to the children, and challenge them to reflect and express their thoughts and actions and to take initiatives themselves.

The image of today’s children and their childhood, their needs, and skills are discussed and researched. In this study, the preschool teachers’ perception about children’s possibilities to develop their civic competences and sense of initiative and influence toward achieving active citizenship of special interest is examined. In the next section, the theoretical framework used is presented.

### **Theoretical framework**

In this study, theories of citizenship are used as a theoretical framework. Citizenship for the young is similar to a transitional stage between childhood and adulthood. Jones and Wallace (1992) and Jones (2008; 2002) claimed that young people are not sovereign members of the community because they are still at the entrance into adulthood. Moreover they argued that young citizens do not have full access to the citizenship rights of adults, but have indirect rights, as children do, through their parents or careers. They further argued that It is therefore reasoned that the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is needed as protection in such situation of dependence.

In the Scandinavian context, the welfare service and early childhood education are based on equality and equity, curricula stating children’s participation and influence, a children’s “ombudsman” for security of children’s rights, and a law against violence towards children. Lister (2007) state that young children should be equipped with skills and capacities for effective citizenship.

It is reasoned that the classic relation between children and adults has changed. Jans (2004) argued about the actual participation discourse and the social construction of childhood. Moreover, childhood is socially constructed from the beliefs, expectations, and values of adults (James and Prout, 1997; Mayall, 2002; Nutbrown & Clough, 2009).

Hengst (2001) even claimed that we are witnessing the liberation of childhood from modernity's educational project. Sommer (2010) stated that adults often negotiate with children, a kind of culture of negotiation (Sommer, 2010).

However, Jans (2004) claimed that, today, the childhood years present themselves as a very ambivalent reality because, on the one hand, children are surrounded with care, and on the other hand, children are stimulated to present themselves as individuals with their own rights. These different social and cultural conceptions of what childhood is and should be are manifested in laws, policies, and a range of steering documents, such as curriculums and institutions that contextualize the everyday lives of children in any society (James, 2011).

Within the new sociology of childhood (Mason & Hood, 2011; Mayall, 2002), the child is seen as a social actor. James, Jenks, and Prout (1998) claimed that being a child is not static, and it populates history. James et.al (1998) even discussed about a new paradigm for the study of childhood that is emerging. Furthermore, they claimed that the child is active in its own right as an agent in its own construction, similar to any adult, in the sense of an agency that concerns the initiation of action by choice. James and Prout (1997) stated that children must be seen as actively involved in the construction of their own social lives, the lives of those around them, and of the societies in which they live. It is further argued by James and Prout (1997) that the public debate about children's and parents' responsibilities is the question about what constitutes childhood. Furthermore, different public discourses compete to define childhood and its relationship to adulthood and parenthood.

Such and Walker (2004) implied that the concept of responsibility emerges as a key variable in the definition of modern childhood and generational differences. On the one hand, children are constructed as being free from responsibilities of the adult world, and on the other hand, modern trends towards individualization emphasize participation. Jans (2004) discussed about the everyday life and claimed that learning is an integral part of our everyday life at every age and in diverse domains. James (2011) asserted that to change children's experiences, what is critical is the unpacking of the cultural discourses through which children live their everyday lives as children, because this is a construction that is ongoing on a daily basis. James (2011) suggested a need for changes in adults' ideas about childhood, including about what children are, what they can do, and how their relationships with adults take place. It is hoped that this research can give some of the answers of that claim.

### **Active citizenship**

It is argued that, today, children and adults are becoming peers in the sense that they both have to learn to give meaning and shape to their active citizenship. Communication is essential for children's meaning-making and understanding of the world around them. Through pedagogical documentation in preschool, children's meaning-making processes can be visualized. Child's strengths, their interests, curiosity, and learning processes can, through pedagogical documentation, create an understanding of children's meaning-making related to what educators in preschool offer children (Bjervås, 2011).

Jans (2004) claimed that active citizenship and participation seem to open more possibilities for linking childhood and active citizenship in a meaningful way. Broström (2012) stated that life in preschool is characterized by activities that contain elements of democracy. Examples given are when children plan their games, they have a dialog, listen to each other, and reach a compromise, creating a mutual goal-directed action. However, participation can be perceived by children as stressful. Nichols (2007), who studied children in preschool and observed teachers working to shape the class from a mixed bag of individual kids and to organize them into a collective operating unit according to classroom routines, values, and rules, found that young children are highly motivated to learn how power works in the collective class. She further observed that maintaining the rules of conduct during floor time, when the children gathered on a mat to participate in a teacher-led activity such as story reading, was the most stressful task for them.

Inspired by psychologist Gilles Deleuze, Lenz Taguchi (2010a) argued for a childhood process oriented educational approach, instead of a linear practice. She wanted an imminent, interactive, and rhizomatic practice for the child who has power and agency. This means that the practice does not start with predefined learning outcomes, but can start everywhere. Children themselves create the process, formulate questions of interest, and are involved in social interactions and co-operative activities with other children and preschool teachers, constructing their own understanding.

Lenz Taguchi (2010a) drew from the work of Barad (2007) and suggested an intra-active pedagogy toward an intra-active relationship between all living organisms and the material environment; for example, artifacts and objects such as clay and water, spaces and places. In the study by Lenz Taguchi (2010b), it was argued that rhizomatic learning processes allow for new interrelations to take place and are inclusive of new connections and intensities of effects and desire in the learning process. It was stated that learning deepens, widens and expands, and takes irregular paths, rather than following a linear progression. “In such approach, learning and becoming are not seen as separated from each other understood as immanent to each other; that is, they are interdependent processes” (p. 15).

Hartley (2010) claimed that the actual process of citizenship formation is carried out by children who individually, collectively, and differently produce citizenship in their actions, form association, and thus identities. In a study involving weekly 1.5-hr storytelling workshops spread across 13 weeks, Phillips (2011) found that children’s actions and words displayed a complexity, of which young children might be active citizens. Phillips (2011) claimed that the multiplicity of complex qualities that these young children portrayed can alert early childhood practitioner to recognize the complexities of young children who can be active citizens in daily interactions.

In the study by Broström (2012), a connection was made between human beings’ need for recognition and individuals’ development of a personal identity and good life. It was argued that when the subject is recognized as a special person, their self-esteem will develop. Furthermore, in preschool, such communities are seen in children’s play, in their mutual relations, and in their shared exploration of the world. Three levels of recognition are identified, namely emotional, legal, and social. Boström (2012) stated that everyday life in preschool must fulfill children’s needs for all three types of recognition and that preschool children must be involved in symmetrical relations with preschool teachers and other children. A child needs to act as an active subject to get positive feedback from other children and be an accepted member of the group playing an important role. Similarly, Bae (2009) found that emotional dimensions of the child, such as playfulness, contribute to open dialogs with children and adults.

To sum up, many of the visible notions of children’s citizenship such as those of James and Prout (1997) and James (2011) are that children’s citizenship is a construction, a process ongoing on a daily basis. Similarly, Lenz Taguchi (2010a) claimed that children themselves create the process, and they are involved in social interactions and co-operative activities with other children and preschool teachers, constructing their own understanding. Boström (2012) presented the word recognition and stated that children’s needs for different types of recognition must be fulfilled for a good life. In preschools, play has an important role in children’s development. In an interview study by Sheridan, Pramling, and Samuelsson (2001) on the question of what children mostly liked to do during their stay at the preschool, the authors found that most of the children in preschool wanted to play or play with friends. In play, children can take initiatives, influence themes of play, decide about their own activities, and do what they want to do. However, play can be interpreted as stressful for children (Nichols, 2007). Sandberg and Pramling Samuelsson (2005) called it “playstress” and claimed that children are interrupted when they plan and that these interruptions depend on preschool teachers, the routines at the preschools, and also organized activities both in preschool and during children’s leisure time.

The position taken in this study is that children’s citizenship is an ongoing construction on a daily basis depending on the preschool as an organization.

### ***Methodology***

In order to find the answers to my research questions a questionnaire was made and interviews were held. One reason for choosing a questionnaire for the research was the possibility to reach all the preschools in the region of Norrbotten. Five in-depth interviews were conducted. The choice of interviewees was done with the background of searching for people with long working experience from preschools. The interviewees were chosen among preschool teachers from three different local municipalities in the region of Norrbotten, earlier known to me from my profession as a teacher educator. Four women and one man were appointed for the one-hour interviews, which were recorded and transcribed afterwards. The respondents had long experience of working as preschool teachers (see below) most of them were aged between 50 and 60. An interview guide was constructed with questions similar to those in the questionnaire.

The following themes were clustered: ‘The curriculum and today’s view on children’, ‘The parents and their time’, ‘Motivation play and leadership’, ‘Communication, curiosity and creativity’, and finally, ‘Self-image, self-esteem and self-confidence’. The interviews were carried out in a dialogue on basis of the different themes.

Person 1 Female, 27 years of working experience (A)

Person 2 Female, 16 years of working experience (B)

Person 3 Female, 34 years of working experience (C)

Person 4 Male, 8 years of working experience (D)

Person 5 Female, 27 years of working experience (E)

In this study, the result from an attitude survey questionnaire was also used. The questionnaire was pilot-tested with four preschool teachers before distribution, and both its reliability and validity were found to be satisfactory. The survey instrument, which contained 34 statements and used a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), was sent to all 13 municipalities in the county of Norrbotten in northern Sweden. Five questionnaires were distributed in each of the total 534 preschools/preschool divisions in Norrbotten, reaching a total of 2670 questionnaires. The questionnaires were distributed to the professionals and other personnel working with children enrolled at the preschools. A total of 529 professionals completed the questionnaire, and preschools from all municipalities were represented.

### **Swedish preschools and active citizenship**

This section presents the result of the interviews and survey. The survey results are illustrated in 10 histograms representing the answers to 10 of the 32 statements. These results included the responses from all 13 municipalities covered in the research. The results from the interview studied are presented as quotations in the text. The participants interviewed were all working in the county of Norrbotten when the research was completed. The overall results are discussed in the next section, and a profile of the results on all statements is provided in the Appendix.

Of the 529 respondents to the questionnaire, 97,9% were women. Many of the respondents have been working at a preschool for a long time: 24.4% have been working for 21–25 years and 38.5% have been working for 26 years or more. About three-fourths (72.0%) of the respondents had formal education as a preschool teacher.

This section is structured according to the themes: the curricula and today’s view on children, the parents and the time, motivation, play and leadership, communication, curiosity and creativity, and finally self-image, self-esteem, and self-confidence.

Since the year 2010, Sweden has implemented a new curriculum for the Preschool Lpfö 98 (2010). Some of the subjects interviewed made comments on the curricula. “The new curriculum are clearly and easier to use when we are working thematically” (B). Preschool teacher (A) argued that “The curriculum places greater demands on teachers – curriculum is targeted” (A). Preschool teacher (B) expressed it in a similar way, “Earlier activities were more micromanaged” (B) and “Great with the curriculum there is clarity of our mission” (B). The notion about the clearness of the curricula was expressed by several of the informants. “.../the goals of the curriculum is clearer and is more about knowledge ... /” (D). One of the subject interviewed thought that the curriculum is “more driven up” (E) and another informed that “Science and technology are lifted clearer into in the curriculum” (A). However, there were also some of the interviewees who expressed some fears. “There is a risk that it will be schools that it will go toward more teaching” (C). “Less of “just to be” and to explore themselves” (C). Some of the informants also expressed their frustration about the new curricula that requires more administration and less time spent with the children “More paperwork clearly requires of evaluation and follow-ups”(C).

As all of the interviewed subjects had long working experience, they were asked more about their own perspective on child in general and that expressed in the curriculum. One of the interviewed subject expressed it as follows: “Earlier the preschool teachers were expected to show and guide the children and show them what was right and wrong and we are expected this result” (B). Another of the preschool teacher argued that “Children are much more challenged today, we give them the possibilities to try by themselves” (C). Moreover, another teacher stated that “Children are more challenged today” (D), while another of the interviewed subject had the following thought about the toddlers: “Above all, it is considered that 1-year-olds can handle a lot more today” (C).

All of the interviewed subjects also gave their views on preschool as a place where children spend a lot of time: "There are children who have very long days at the preschool" (A;B), "Children have longer days at the preschool when they had earlier" (C), and "The children are small and many of them have long days at the preschool" (D). Some of the interviewees argued that the parents have changed (B): "The parents work a lot, it is common that the children stay at the preschool full time, even the small children that are 1 years old" (C). Preschool teacher (E) had the same experience and stated that "The children are longer days at the preschool no one work part time today" (E). Some of the informants argued that it is the self within the parents: "It is the ego of the parents, I will work out, I will go shopping, I will go travelling" (B), and another claimed that "Some children have little time spent with their parents who want to realize themselves" (B). Informant (C) noticed the same and argued that "Parents want to have their own time; they also talk about having their own time" (C). However, the informants appeared to be comfortable about the organization of the preschool and their own professionalism. "The preschool is a safe base in an otherwise more fragmented life situation with new types of families" (B). One of the interviewees argued that parents are nice but they are more stressed than before: "Parents are more stressed today it is not unusually that they are sitting talking in their mobile phones when they come to pick up their children, I use to ask them to quit" (E).

The next section describes about the children's, preschool teachers', and families' experiences of the concept of time.

### **Parents and the concept of time**

Several of the interviewees argued that the parents are more conscious nowadays about choosing the right preschool for their children: "Parents are more conscious today, they raise demand and they know their rights" (C). Another example is that parents do more research before they decide on which preschool their child shall attend to: "Parents are coming to visit the preschool before they decide to accept a place and sometimes they change to another preschool" (C). One of the interviewed subject (A) mentioned the level of education of the parents, arguing that they have higher level of education today and also put higher demand on the activities, and gave an example that parents can ask for education in English for their enrolled children. Respondent (C) similarly argued that "The parents are engaged about the content at the preschool and the activities; it can be about children's language development, mathematics or questions about values in the society."

The preschool teachers' lack of time, the greater frequencies of larger groups of children, and the difficulties to replace staff were topics that constantly returned in the preschool teachers' stories. It was argued that the group of children has been higher together with less staff and that less time is spent with the children. "Groups of children have become larger, less staff leaves less time for the kids" (A); furthermore, "Earlier we could make trips or go to the bathhouse" (A) and "In the past we had four full-time staff of 15 children" (C). One of the interviewed subject was satisfied to be close to the forest (E) as a compensation for structural changes because of less staff. Preschool teacher (C) was happy that the children enjoy their stay at the preschool, although their longer stays and mean that school them to be enrolled at the preschool works well. However, preschool teacher (C) also reflected the consequences of larger groups of children. "Larger groups of children and higher volume make stressed and restless children" (C). She stated that they, from early ages, can see that children do not feel well at the preschool, "There will be more stress for both children and preschool teachers with large groups of children" (C). Preschool teacher (E) claimed that it is difficult to get personal resources and that it is difficult to satisfy children, especially those who have a form of diagnosis. "Every child have a unique need and we need to know what it really is" (E).

One of the interviewed subject stated that ".../ if it had been a busy day without no replacement staff I use to lock me self in together with a smaller group of children to get power from them" (E). One of the informants gave another perspective about structure and organization. "However, it is as well about how to organize our day and about the structure, it is not unusually that five preschool teachers go out with the children" (B).

A part of the daily work at the preschool is pedagogical documentation such as photos taken of the activities, pictures that children have drawn, or things that children have made of different materials. One of the informants argued that pedagogical documentation is to reflect and analyze materials together with the children and their parents. "Pedagogical documentation – that is to reflect and analyze together" (A). However, it was argued that lack of time makes it more difficult to reflect over the pedagogical documentation (C): "Pedagogical documentation takes a lot of our time for administration.

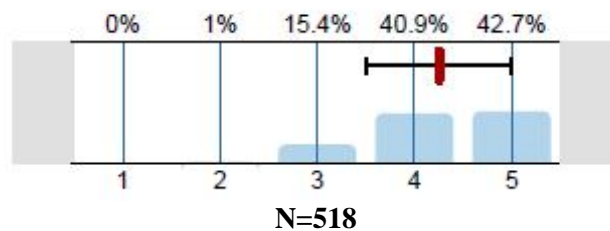


We take a lot of pictures but we do not have time to processing them. What shall we actually have are focus on? It is a balancing act” (C). Similar comments were made by preschool teacher (D): “Pedagogical documentation takes a long time and we have been discussed for whom we do all this” (D). It was possible to notice the frustration of the staff about the possibilities to fulfill their mission of the curricula.

### Motivation

From the interviews, one can notice that the preschool teachers think that it is important for the children to have the possibility to develop their inner motivation. Preschool teacher (C) stated that “Preschool teachers are more tolerant today, we take down things to the child’s length and let them choose themselves, and children are given more opportunities to choose. We have better facilities and more material to choose among” (C). Moreover, she claimed that “It is all about to find the key to each child” (C). The concept of motivation was also focused in the questionnaire. In the questionnaire, the staffs were asked about their opinion of whether children can develop their inner motivation during their stay at the preschool. It can be clearly seen from the responses to the questionnaire that staff have the opinion that enrolled children can develop their inner motivation.

**Figure 1. Children can develop their inner motivation**



More than three-fourths of the respondents (83.6%) partly or totally agreed with the statement that children can develop their inner motivation.

One of the interviewed subject talked about the competent child, "Today there is talk of the competent child" (C) and "Earlier our task were to take care of the children now they are more competent" (A). Another of the preschool teacher stated that "We give the kids chance to be heard, we teach the children, and we learn alongside the children" (B) and argued that "They will be challenged in their own thoughts" (B). Preschool teacher (C) claimed that "Children's interests control much more of the daily activities." One of the preschool teachers gave an example of how children are encouraged from an early age to take food by themselves at the meals. "The preschool had a buffé table and even the really small children were pouring their milk themselves" (E).

In the next section, the results of the study of the themes, play, and leadership are presented.

### Play and leadership

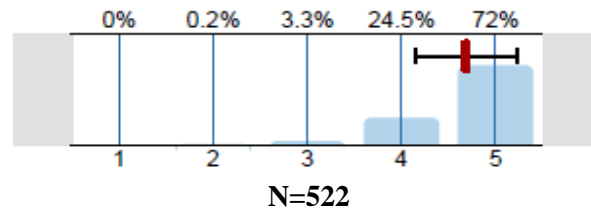
Several of the interviewed subjects commented on the importance of children’s play: “Children’s play are always important”(C;D). Through children’s activities, the preschool teachers tried to understand, trace, and reflect on their learning process. “Children’s play are very important and I often take part with a role” (E). Preschool teacher (C) stated that the interest of the children rules the play and that they sometimes try to find calm and cosy corners. “Sometimes the staff goes in and takes a role in the play, the children learn the language of play, they learn to interpret signals of play, this places great demands on teachers” (C). One of the interviewed subjects argued that pleasure seems to be something fundamental for the dimension of play (E). She also claimed that it often seems like preschool teachers and children have fun (B). Preschool teacher (A) stated that “In play children can exercise their social skills, to wait on their turn and to communicate” (A).

Preschool teacher (C) further claimed that "Some children are leader types, the kids are stronger in asserting their will especially against adults, they are used to express their own will" (C). During the interview, she compared children of today with earlier generation and argued that the children of today are, what she called, “negotiation children,” "The parents are negotiating with their children" (C). Furthermore, she expressed that "Parents have the facility that they want to negotiate with the children; they have a gentle appearance and charisma to the children" (C).

In the questionnaire, the staffs were also asked about their opinion of whether children enrolled at the preschool can develop their ability to play. The results are shown in Figure 2.



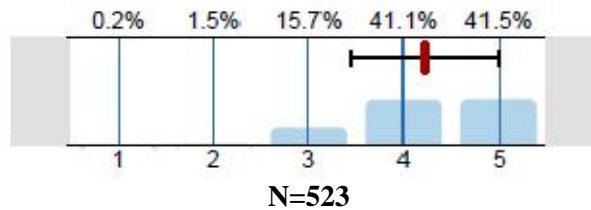
**Figure 2: Children can develop the ability to play**



A majority of respondents (72.0%) strongly agreed with the statement that children can develop their ability to play.

In the questionnaire, there was another question about children’s leadership through play and whether the staff thought that children could develop their leadership within their play.

**Figure 3; Children can develop their leadership skills through play**



Majority of the respondents (82.6%) partly or strongly agreed with the statement that children can develop their leadership skills through play.

From both the figures, it is clear that staff believe that children enrolled in preschool can develop their skills through play.

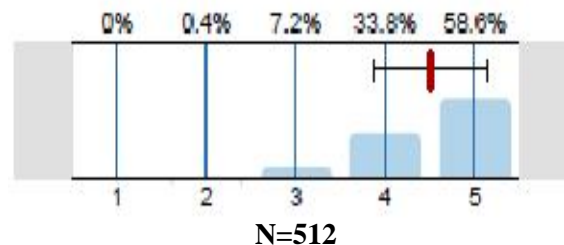
**Communication**

The Swedish preschool has as a mission to develop activities where children are made as participants in communicating together with preschool teachers and with other enrolled children.

Children enrolled in Swedish preschools are also a part of the curricula and the UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child, and are supposed to take part in and acquire communicative tools as children’s vital democratic right. By participating in the creation of meaningful dialogs, children are supposed to learn to talk, use different tools to participate in dialog with others, and see themselves as participants in a conversation. A fundamental democratic issue, especially for the youngest children enrolled in the preschool, is to gain experience as a person who is participating in communicative conversations with others.

In the questionnaire, the staffs were asked about children’s ability to carry on a conversation with others, and the results are shown in Figure 4.

**Figure 4: Children can develop their ability to carry on a conversation with others**



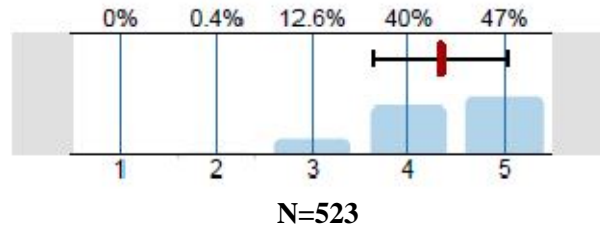
Almost all of the respondents (92.4%) partly or strongly agreed with the statement that children can develop their ability to carry on a conversation with others.

One of the topics in the interviews was communication. In the interviews, preschool teacher (A) argued that "The kids are trained very consciously to communicate with each other; we want to make children aware of that they can resolve things themselves" (A).

One part of the communication process is to have responsibilities in different ways, such as to be an active listener.

In the questionnaire, preschool teachers were asked about children’s ability to have responsibility in more general terms, and, as one can see from Figure 5, their opinions were affirmative.

**Figure 5: Children can develop their ability to have responsibility**

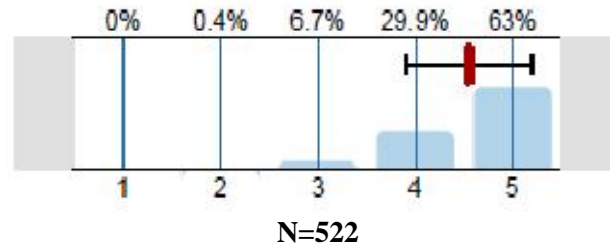


Most of the respondents (87.0%) partly or strongly agreed with the statement that children can develop their ability to have responsibility.

A strategy in the curricula for children's learning is to help ensure that children’s curiosity can be advanced along with their initiatives and interests. Preschool teacher (A) claimed “Children considered to be more competent than before, they are considered eager to learn and willing to attend and take part in different activities” (A). One of the preschools found its inspiration from Italy and the district of Reggio Emilia, and used methods that stimulate children’s creativity: “We try to create an environment that develops children's creativity; we are inspired by Reggio Emilia” (E).

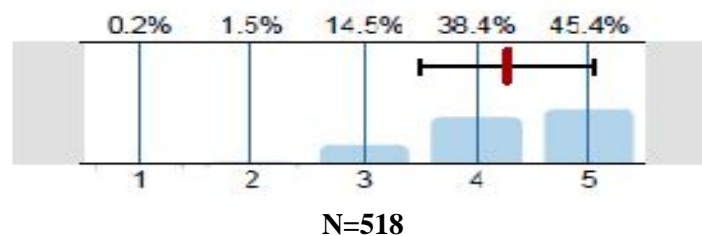
Similar expressions were seen in the questionnaire when preschool teachers were asked about children’s ability to develop their curiosity as well as imagination, and the results are shown in Figures 6 and 7.

**Figure 6: Children can develop their curiosity.**



Most of the respondents (92.9%) partly or totally agreed with the statement that children can develop their curiosity.

**Figure 7: Children can develop their imagination.**



Most of the respondents (83.8%) partly or totally agreed with the statement that children can develop their imagination.

Creativity and initiation were also topics of questions during the interviews. Preschool teacher (B) stated that it was different years before, when compared with that today, because, earlier, children had to have permission to stay at the playing room or to do paintings, and she also claimed that already-prepared material was common. She further argued that a strategy for children's learning is to help ensure that children are allowed to be curious and that their curiosity are challenged and they are given possibilities to explore the world both inside and outside the preschool (B).

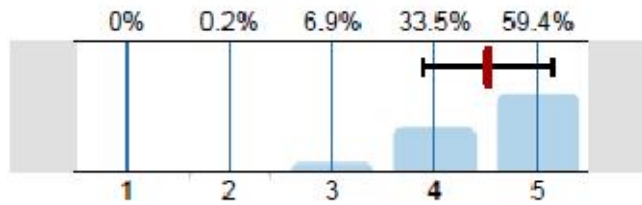
However, one of the interviewed subject had a different opinion about children’s possibilities and stated that “Earlier it was different we did more fun things, now the curriculum says that we have to learn children different things” (A).

**Self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-image**

In the curricula for the Swedish preschool, it is stated that the preschool shall work actively for the development of children’s selves.

In the questionnaire, the staffs were asked about the enrolled children’s possibilities to develop different skills of their self and they were asked about the opinion of children’s self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-image.

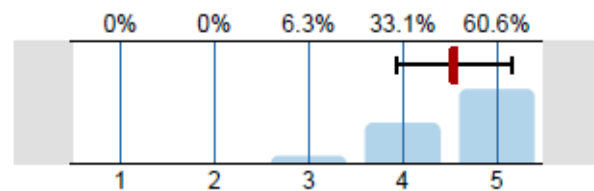
**Figure 8: Children can develop their self-esteem.**



N=520

More than half of the respondents (59.4%) strongly agreed with the statement that children can develop their self-esteem.

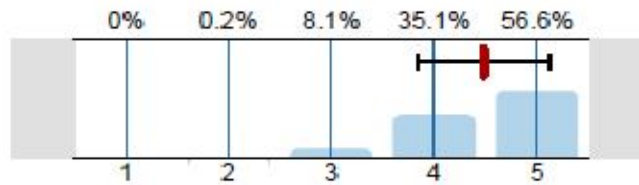
**Figure 9: Children can develop their self-confidence.**



N=520

Nearly all of the respondents (93.7%) partly or strongly agreed with the statement that children can develop their self-image.

**Figure 10: Children can develop their self-image.**



N=519

Among the respondents, 35.1% partly agreed and 56.6% totally agreed with the statement that children can develop their self-esteem.

Several comments were also made about this during the interview: “We have higher requirements to make the children independent” (A). Preschool teacher (E) argued “Silent and withdrawn children are encouraged to participate in the activities” (E). Preschool teacher (A) argued further that “Currently children get more heard” (A) and “The children are trained to develop their independence, they should not be disposed of” (A). Preschool teacher (E) expressed that “We listen to the children, and often they have the possibility to try to do things for themselves” (E). Hence, it was also argued that “Today’s children are more independent and have a good self-image, however is the self-esteem not strong in the same way” (A).

In the next section, the results obtained will be discussed.

### **Citizenship and active citizenship: Useful tools for the future?**

The purposes of this research were to make visible, highlight, and illuminate preschool teachers' perception of the abilities that children can develop during their stay at preschools. Preschool should support children's interest in learning and mastering new experiences, knowledge, and skills. The cornerstone of this process is that the curriculum should focus on children's exploration, curiosity, creativity, and desire to learn.

Several of the interviews showed that the adults seem to see the child as a person with potential abilities, abilities that the child has not yet achieved. At the right time and with adequate help from the outside world, these innate skills will be developed. One of the interviewees spoke of the competent child. Another of the interviewed subject felt that the view of children today, has changed. The research showed that, today, kids are challenged more, and that staff encourage the children and give them opportunities to develop as individuals.

Hengst (2001) argued that we are witnessing a liberation of childhood from the modernity of educational project. This was also observed in this research. In Sweden, parents have the possibility to choose what preschool they want their child to attend to. One of the interviewed preschool teachers did comment on this and told that parents do research about the preschools in the neighborhood before choosing one. Today, parents are a part of the ongoing liberation of the society seen in Western Europe from the 1980s. The educational level among enrolled children's parents has increased during the last decade. Preschool teachers have noticed the change and expressed that parents are more conscious today, and know their rights and privileges as parents.

The preschool staff's opinion about their lack of time was noted more or less in all interviews. Some of them talked about stressed and restless children because of larger groups of children, and others stated about problems in getting replacement staff. This can be compared with the findings of Nichols (2007), who claimed that children can experience stress during floor time when they gather on a mat to participate in a teacher-led activity. In this research, no interviews were conducted with children. However, from this research, it is possible to argue that situations where both staff and children can probably have stressful feelings might not be unusual because teacher-led activities are daily activities at Swedish preschools. Several arguments point in that direction, along with issues such as the increasing number of groups of enrolled children and problem to get replacement staff in this part of the country.

Pedagogical documentation at preschools is also mentioned as an activity among staff that can be experienced as stressful. Observations of children's play and activities, drawn pictures, photos taken, and other children's handicrafts are all a part of the pedagogical documentation, which is an analysis method and tool that can be used for the dialog with the child and with the parents about their children's development and learning. From this research, it seems to be important to find a balance between the aim of the pedagogical documentation and the time in progress, especially because of lack of time among several staff, which is perceived as problematic.

### **Communication, play, and leadership**

In the Curriculum for the Preschool Lpfö 98 (2010), it is stated that play is important for the child's development and learning. In the curriculum, it is expressed that preschools should promote play, creativity, and enjoyment of learning, and strengthen the child's interest in learning and capturing new experiences, knowledge, and skills. From the results of the questionnaire, it was clearly seen that the majority of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement that children can develop their ability to play, and the majority of the respondents partly or strongly agreed with the statement that children can develop their skills through play.

This was also confirmed among the interviewed subjects who claimed that it is in play that children can learn how to communicate.

Jans (2004) stated that learning is an integral part of our everyday life at every age and in diverse domains. James and Prout (1997) claimed that children must be seen as actively involved in the construction of their own social lives, and James (2011) similarly argued that children's construction of their citizenship is an ongoing process that occurs on a daily basis. In such constructions, children's possibilities to use their abilities as participants in communication are critical for their citizenship development. Furthermore, children's possibilities to embrace their fundamental democratic rights, such as to have influence over their own situation and to have the possibility to participate in daily activities at the preschool with standpoint from their own abilities and interest, are also critical.

In the questionnaire, the staffs were asked about children's ability to carry on a conversation with others during their stay at the preschool. The result and positive responses strengthen the argument that children enrolled in preschools in the county of Norrbotten have possibilities to develop their active citizenship in their daily activities if they are seen and confirmed by the staff at the preschools.

### **Motivation and the selves**

Children's intrinsic motivation is important for their development and learning. More than three-fourths of the respondents (83.6%) of the questionnaire partly or totally agreed with the statement that children enrolled in preschools can develop their intrinsic motivation. There is a close connection between intrinsic motivation and skills such as ability to take initiative and develop self-confidence and self-esteem. Broström (2012) stated that there is a connection between human beings' need for recognition and individuals' development of a personal identity and good life. One of the informants even stated that children should be challenged in their own thoughts, which would be an opportunity for the preschool teachers to reflect on what are actually children's own thoughts.

From the questionnaire, one can notice that most of the respondents (93.7%) partly or strongly agreed with the statement that children can develop their self-confidence within their stay at the preschool. On the other hand, few of the respondents (59.4%) strongly agreed and (33.5%) partly agreed with the statement that children can develop their self-esteem. In the interviews, preschool teacher (A) stated about the difference between self-image and self-esteem, and claimed that self-esteem is not developed among children in the same way as their self-image. From the research, it seems that staff are conscious about the significance and importance of a developed self for the children as a part of their possibility to acquire active citizenship.

### **Imagination and curiosity**

In the curricula Lpfö 98 (2010), it is stated that children's curiosity should be encouraged and children's will and desire to learn should be stimulated. In the questionnaire, the staffs were asked whether they thought that children could develop their curiosity and imagination within the preschool. Most of the respondents (92.9%) partly or totally agreed with the statement that children can develop their curiosity, and also partly or totally agreed (83.8%) with the statement that children can develop their imagination. Although it seems from the result that children have the possibilities to develop these skills, the curricula also point at skills that are stated in the framework, which children need to learn, and one of the respondents argued "It is more like school today." This research did not find an answer to the question of how this is combined at the preschools in their daily activities, although the results signal that children at the preschools can develop their curiosity and imagination, and, at the same time, follow the curricula and profession as their framework.

Although there are some limitations in the material such as lack of the children's voices, it can be argued that children have possibilities to construct their citizenship on a daily basis. From the research, it can be found that preschool teacher considered that children can develop different abilities that in turn make it possible to be a co-actor in the construction of their citizenship. Activities at preschool can contain elements of democracy such as to reach a compromise in children's games or having a dialog with other children to reach consensus. From the result one can argue that preschool teachers seem to be aware of the possibilities the preschools have to organize activities to development of children active citizenship. However, one has to bear in mind that genuine participation is hard to achieve although the awareness of its importance is present daily.

In conclusion, based on preschool staff's opinion, children enrolled in Swedish preschools in the county of Norrbotten have possibilities to develop as active citizens and, as a consequence, develop active citizenship.

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## Appendix Profile

Compilation: Survey Total Förskola 2012

### 2. Jag ser förskolan där jag arbetar idag som en verksamhet där:

2.1) barnen kan utveckla sin egen inre drivkraft	Instämmer inte alls									Instämmer helt	n=518 av.=4.3
2.2) barnen kan utveckla sin förmåga att <b>ha</b> ansvar	Instämmer inte alls									Instämmer helt	n=523 av.=4.3
2.3) barnen kan utveckla sin förmåga att <b>ta</b> ansvar	Instämmer inte alls									Instämmer helt	n=521 av.=4.4
2.4) barnen kan utveckla sin förmåga att samarbeta med andra inom verksamheten	Instämmer inte alls									Instämmer helt	n=514 av.=4.6
2.5) barnen kan utveckla sin förmåga att förstå andras perspektiv	Instämmer inte alls									Instämmer helt	n=522 av.=4.2
2.6) barnen kan utveckla sin kännedom om sin närmiljö	Instämmer inte alls									Instämmer helt	n=526 av.=4.2
2.7) barnen kan utveckla sin förmåga att förstå världen utanför förskolan	Instämmer inte alls									Instämmer helt	n=522 av.=3.7
2.8) barnen kan utveckla sin självständighet	Instämmer inte alls									Instämmer helt	n=525 av.=4.5
2.9) barnen kan utveckla sitt ledarskap i leken	Instämmer inte alls									Instämmer helt	n=523 av.=4.2
2.10) barnen kan utveckla sitt ledarskap genom aktiviteter	Instämmer inte alls									Instämmer helt	n=522 av.=4.2
2.11) barnen kan utveckla sin förmåga att se och hantera konsekvenser av sitt eget handlande	Instämmer inte alls									Instämmer helt	n=525 av.=4.3
2.12) barnen kan utveckla sin förmåga att se och bekräfta andra	Instämmer inte alls									Instämmer helt	n=518 av.=4.3
2.13) barnen kan utveckla sin förmåga att förmedla ett budskap till andra	Instämmer inte alls									Instämmer helt	n=514 av.=4.3
2.14) barnen kan utveckla sin förmåga att lyssna på andra	Instämmer inte alls									Instämmer helt	n=517 av.=4.5
2.15) barnen kan utveckla sin förmåga att föra ett samtal med andra	Instämmer inte alls									Instämmer helt	n=512 av.=4.5
2.16) barnen kan utveckla medvetenhet om sina talanger	Instämmer inte alls									Instämmer helt	n=516 av.=4.1
2.17) barnen kan utveckla förmågan att uttrycka sig i drama	Instämmer inte alls									Instämmer helt	n=515 av.=3.7
2.18) barnen kan utveckla förmågan att uttrycka sig i bild och form	Instämmer inte alls									Instämmer helt	n=519 av.=4.4
2.19) barnen kan utveckla förmågan att leka	Instämmer inte alls									Instämmer helt	n=522 av.=4.7
2.20) barnen kan utveckla sin nyfikenhet	Instämmer inte alls									Instämmer helt	n=522 av.=4.6
2.21) barnen kan utveckla sin uppfinningsrikedom	Instämmer inte alls									Instämmer helt	n=518 av.=4.3
2.22) barnen kan utveckla sin förmåga att omsätta en möjlighet till handling	Instämmer inte alls									Instämmer helt	n=516 av.=4.1
2.23) barnen kan utveckla sin förmåga att se möjligheter	Instämmer inte alls									Instämmer helt	n=521 av.=4.2
2.24) barnen kan utveckla sin förmåga att kunna genomföra idéer i verksamheten	Instämmer inte alls									Instämmer helt	n=517 av.=4.1
2.25) barnen kan utveckla sin förmåga att klara av ändrade förutsättningar	Instämmer inte alls									Instämmer helt	n=517 av.=4.1

2.26) barnen kan utveckla förmågan att se olika möjliga lösningar i en situation	Instämmer inte alls					Instämmer helt	n=515 av.=4.2
2.27) barnen kan utveckla förmågan att se möjligheter och lösningar istället för problem	Instämmer inte alls					Instämmer helt	n=517 av.=4.1
2.28) barnen kan utveckla sin självkänsla	Instämmer inte alls					Instämmer helt	n=520 av.=4.5
2.29) barnen kan utveckla sitt självförtroende	Instämmer inte alls					Instämmer helt	n=520 av.=4.5
2.30) barnen kan utveckla sin självbild	Instämmer inte alls					Instämmer helt	n=519 av.=4.5
2.31) barnen kan utveckla sin förmåga att hantera sina egna känslor	Instämmer inte alls					Instämmer helt	n=512 av.=4.4
2.32) barnen kan utveckla sin förmåga att hantera och förstå andras känslor	Instämmer inte alls					Instämmer helt	n=518 av.=4.3
2.33) barnen kan utveckla sin förmåga att känna tillit till andra barn	Instämmer inte alls					Instämmer helt	n=518 av.=4.4
2.34) barnen kan utveckla sin förmåga att känna tillit till vuxna	Instämmer inte alls					Instämmer helt	n=513 av.=4.6