

# To author yourself: Teachers in Swedish school-age educare centres describe their professional identity

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**Abstract:** This study aims to construct knowledge about how teachers in Swedish school-age educare centres build on their professional identity by listening to their narratives about their work, their interpretations of their mission and how they apply their intentions. The study takes its point of departure from sociocultural (Vygotsky, 1978) and dialogical (Bakhtin, 1986) perspectives. The analysis starts with Bakhtin's notion of authoring. The construction of data was carried out in three steps. Firstly, by collecting written narratives from 21 teachers, secondly by oral narratives from ten teachers among the 21 teachers participating in 'walk-and-talk' conversations and finally from a commonly created conversation in two focus interviews with eight of the teachers. The results from this study indicate that there is a commonly shared general discourse unifying the professional identity of the teacher in school-age educare centres.

**Keywords:** professional identity, school-age educare teacher, sociocultural and dialogical perspectives, narratives, authoring

## Introduction

The school-age educare centres in Sweden have roots from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, are implemented all over the country, they are organised as whole-day activities complementing the school and are regulated by the national curriculum and staffed by university-educated teachers. Still, the profession as teacher in educare centres is described as being characterised by weak framing, and the professionals are said to suffer from both stated and unstated demands, lack of visions and unclear claims (Andersson, 2013; Hjalmarsson, 2013). Andersson reports that teachers in school-age educare centres face dilemmas related to comprehensive decentralisation, the introduction of new public management systems, reduced resources and closer links between educare centres and schools. Working with traditional methods is problematic, and it becomes hard to balance the work between the activity in the educare centre and the school. Andersson maintains that the different ways in which teachers in educare centres handle new tasks and changes to their circumstances are related to the local organisation, the governance and the signals from the headmasters.

## Swedish school-age educare centre

The Swedish school-age educare centres are well established all over the country. Attending the school-age educare centre is voluntary and about 84% of the children between 6-9 years old are enrolled in the school-age educare centres (The Swedish National Agency for Education, 2017). 21.5% of the children aged 10-12 are also enrolled in school-age educare centres. The number of children per school-age educare teacher has increased during the last 30 years. At the beginning of the 1980s, the average group consisted of 18 children per two school-age educare teachers. In 2016, an average group of children in school-age educare centre consisted of 40.3 children. Most of this increase occurred during the 1990s. However, the increase has continued into the twenty-first century and in the latest ten years the groups have increased by one child per year, while the number of teachers in school-age educare centres has not increased correspondingly.

The personnel working with school-age educare are mostly educated school-age educare teachers, with a three-year university-based teacher education – but due to the shortage of educated school-age educare teachers, there are also personnel who have backgrounds as preschool-teachers, primary- or secondary school teachers, recreational activity leaders and also persons working in the school-age educare centres without a university education. The positions are regulated, and there are no volunteers working in the Swedish school-age educare centres.

## University-based education

The professionals working in school-age educare centres with an education from before 2001 are called leisure-time pedagogues. In 2001 the education changed, and then ten years later, in 2011, it changed again. Now the profession is called ‘teachers towards work in leisure-time centres<sup>1</sup>’. In the Swedish teacher-education there are three specialisations directed towards children in the early school-age; one towards preschool-class till grade 3, one towards grades 4-6 and the third towards work in school-age educare centres. Besides working in school-age educare centres, teachers working at school-age educare centres also get qualifications to teach pupils in grade 4-6 in practical/aesthetic subjects within the framework of the school.

## School-age educare centres complementing the school

In Sweden, there is a close cooperation between the school-age educare centre and the school. The Swedish National Curriculum stipulates that forms of co-operation between preschools, compulsory schools and educare provided for school-age children in school-age educare centres shall be developed with an objective to enrich the pupils’ development and learning (The Swedish National Agency, 2011, rev. 2017, p. 10). All Swedish educational policy documents have as their starting point the child’s perspective. The definition of

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1 In this article the leisure-time centre is labeled school-age educare centre with the purpose of highlighting the relation between education and care. The school-age educare centres were earlier denominated leisure-time centres or recreation centres, and there is a heated discussion in Sweden aiming to create new concepts that more clearly explain the purpose and content of the activity.

school-age educare embrace and emphasises that both education and care are given in this activity directed towards children in the early school-ages and located in school-age educare centres which are mainly located inside school-buildings. Other international denominations for kindred activities are 'extended education' or 'all-day school'. Although the educare activity for school-age children in school-age educare centres is well established, the research concerning the activity in school-age educare centres and the professional role is scarce.

### The activity in Swedish school-age educare centres

The activity in school-age educare centres is elaborated on the interaction between different practices; the school, the home and the school-age educare centre, aiming to create coherence in children's everyday lives. The activity is based on care and play. Modern educational theories have created a growing interest for the processes of meaning-making, care and leisure that are supposed to happen in school-age educare centres (Klerfelt & Haglund, 2014a). Through the practical educational tradition developed over decades, the activity is characterised by a child-centric perspective, where interaction between the children and the school-age educare teachers constitutes the foundation of the educational activity.

The activity is primarily based on the children's perspective and puts children's meaning-making processes in the centre. The children are seen as actors and participants in the construction of culture. Through aesthetic learning processes, children's cognitive abilities, communication skills and constructions of identities and relationships are supported. Tools for these learning processes are formed and structured in the situated learning that provides children with opportunities for applying meaning-making processes in authentic situations. Through children and teachers' reciprocal actions, the discursive context is created in which the activity is composed. In the school-age educare centre, children with different ethnicities, different backgrounds and different experiences meet. Meetings that both call for and invite to intersubjective processes with the opportunity to take the other person's perspectives and to understand the motivations behind the actions of others. The space for children's participation is an essential part of the traditions in the school-age educare centre and offers children the opportunity to learn how to participate in democratic processes, where they also learn about their own rights and the right to be respected. The educational activity in school-age educare centres aims to create an everyday life where human and world is held together (Klerfelt, 1999; 2007).

### Aim and research question

This study aims to construct knowledge about how teachers in school-age educare centres build on their professional identities by listening to their narratives about their work, their interpretations of their mission and how they apply their intentions. The research question seeks to investigate whether or not there is a shared general discourse in the educational traditions providing the basis for a commonly shared professional identity.

## Theoretical framework

The study takes its point of departure from sociocultural (Vygotsky, 1978) and dialogical (Bakhtin, 1986) perspectives. A fundamental position within the sociocultural perspective is that knowledge is constructed and reconstructed by people together, and that there is a need to understand meaning-making as a basis for human actions. Human interaction and tools used for these interactions are situated in the social and cultural practice where people live and are seen as institutionally and historically developed. This implies that the social practice at school-age educare centres is a consequence of human conceptions and attempts to structure and categorise the activity. The participants, in this study, in their role as teachers in school-age educare centres, produce and reproduce their profession in their everyday social practices, regulated by policy documents and through interactions with other actors in the educational setting, through mutual negotiations, or to use Bakhtin's words, they author themselves (1986). One of the most important tools for these processes is language. Besides social practice, practice also involves discursive practice. This aspect of practice shapes the way, or the ways, in which the teachers speak about educare activity in the school-age educare centres. Discursive practice is based on how the teachers in school-age educare centres interpret their responsibilities and the policy documents that describe the objectives for school-age educare centres.

In this study, the analysis starts with Bakhtin's notion of authoring. To develop a common voice, the teachers rest in a polyphony of voices. By narrating, they author themselves. The construction of self lies in language practices. Language shapes our perception of the world and the self is constituted by discourses. According to Bakhtin, it is impossible to voice oneself without appropriating the words of others. Narrative spaces, such as educare centres, become the intertextual ground for contesting the voices of others, reaccentuating their utterances with new meaning, and re-interpreting the self through the other (Vitanova, 2004).

## Previous research

The activity in school-age educare centres has roots back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and was in these days mainly set up in the big cities. In the 1960-1970 period, the activity grew quickly to encompass all parts of Sweden and more and more children joined the activity. In 1984, we have the first research studying school-age educare teachers' view of their work (Johansson, 1984). This thesis was then followed by three other theses made by Calander (1999), Hansen (1999) and Haglund (2004). The research reported in these theses direct their focus in relation to the mission of the primary school teachers when studying the role of the school-age educare teacher.

Calander (1999) is studying the collaboration between school-age educare teachers and primary school teachers. The study takes a social constructionist/constructivist perspective, and the qualitative data was analysed by means of notions from Giddens's (1984) theory of structuration. The results show that the primary school teacher position in the educational institution dominates the position of the school-age educare teacher. An unequal occupa-

tional relation has thus been established, and that makes collaboration in interprofessional work teams harder. In his conclusion Calander states that school-age educare teachers wishing to keep or develop an occupational identity as a school-age educare teacher could best do so outside of school and outside of interprofessional collaboration with primary school teachers. The same year, 1999, Hansen presented her thesis examining the same phenomenon with an ethnographic approach. Her results show that the two categories of teachers have different conceptions of their professional identities depending on which tradition they belong to. The primary school teacher looks upon the teacher function as a mediator in children's learning, while the school-age educare teacher sees her/himself mainly as a model for the child. The primary school teachers' professional culture is here described as a culture with a relatively strong classification and framing, and the school-age educare teacher's culture is described as a culture with weaker classifications and framing. The third thesis exploring primary school teachers' and school-age educare teachers' ways of working together in school was conducted by Haglund (2004) a few years later. He also took his point of departure in Giddens's (1984) theory of structuration and used qualitative data. In his study, three different forms of working practices are identified and described as: a social-directed practice, a school-directed practice and an integrating practice. Haglund describes these working practices as regionalised and notes that they support different social positions of labour. The positions are: social fosterer, school assistant, school follower and integrating renewer. The results indicate that primary school teachers do not necessarily dominate the school-age educare teachers as regards the content of their activities in circle time. It is possible for school-age educare teachers to demarcate and control their own work. The results also indicate that there are possibilities for school-age educare teachers to contribute to integration of different traditions and help change existing work in schools.

A decennium later, other questions are affecting professional identities and need to be researched. In her thesis from 2013, Andersson presents findings about how the professional identity of the school-age educare teachers can be understood in the tension between tradition and new forms of governance. The results, generated through interviews, document analysis and surveys and analysed from profession theories perspectives, show that the profession of teacher towards work in educare centres is being reshaped and that these teachers' professional identity can be understood in different ways. Andersson finds four types of professional identities in her study: the backup teachers, the teachers of social competence, the teachers complementing school and the traditional teachers towards work in educare centres. The study also illustrates how a core of a traditional knowledge base stands out as central for most of the professionals in the various professional identities found. The differences are related to the local governance of schools' organisation: to what extent the work of the teachers in educare centres is placed in the compulsory school day and how strong their collective base is in the school unit<sup>2</sup>.

A short look at research conducted outside Sweden shows that the results are also pointing to the fact that multi-professional collaboration between primary school teachers and other educational staff, for example in Germany, is underdeveloped (Böhm-Kasper, Dizinger, & Gausling, 2016).

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2 Andersson, Calander and Haglund use the denomination 'leisure-time centre' and 'leisure-time pedagogues'.

To sum up, you could say that the earlier research about the professional identity of the school-age educare teacher were mainly directed towards comparing the different positions of the school-teacher and the school-age educare teacher with the purpose of analysing why conflicts repeatedly occurred when school-age educare teachers and primary school-teachers were meant to collaborate in the school-setting. But the time has now come to explore other dimensions of the profession. The research conducted in the project reported in this article is not mainly directed towards any other educational profession, but towards the mission of the school-age educare teacher. The study aims to construct knowledge about how teachers in school-age educare centres build on their own professional identity by listening to their narratives about their work, their interpretations of their mission and how they apply their intentions.

## Methodology

Written and oral narratives are used as ways to come close to – not only what is told in the story – but also the personal experiences of the storytellers. The opportunities for reflection and clarification are more evident in a narrative interview compared to conventional interviews (Mischler, 1986). Narrative conversations are used with the purpose of establishing a dialogue about a mutually construed object (Linell, 1998). In a so-called, ‘walk-and-talk’ conversation (Haudrup Christensen, 2004), the participant leads the researcher to different places and gives their account of them. This is a way to allocate to the participating teacher the power to control the content of the conversation based on a posed question. This part of the study takes this scenario one step further by abandoning conventional open-ended and non-emotionally charged questions (Klerfelt, 2007; Klerfelt & Haglund, 2014b). This choice is made with reference to dialogical theory that suggests that agreement pertaining to interpreted objects is created in the interaction between the persons taking part in a conversation (Linell, 2009). This means that in this study, the school-age educare teachers and the researchers are free to use emotionally charged adjectives and expressions. The intention behind this approach is to use emotion-based questions for the purpose of provoking the perspectives of the participating school-age educare teachers by creating space for them to define the situation. The focus interviews (Merton, Fiske & Kendall, 1956) are used to deepen and extend the answers given in the written narratives and to contribute to the ideas of the interpretation of the material. The marker ‘focus’ indicates that the group is composed for a particular purpose, that the conversation is focused around a given theme and that there is a designated moderator who assumes a management role (Kruger & Casey, 2000). In an ideal situation, the group creates fertile ground for critical discussions and reflections thanks to the peer dynamics. The data obtained in a focused interview shows how participants collectively talk about a certain phenomenon. It is the thought structures or deep-seated values that are revealed in the common conversation that constitutes the unit of analysis.

## Participants

21 school-age educare teachers working in school-age educare centres located in a medium-sized town and from five small municipalities in the middle of Sweden participated in the first part of the construction of data, the written narratives. Ten of these 21 school-age educare teachers participated in the walk-and-talk conversations and eight in the focus interviews. One criterion for participation in the study was to have a two-year university education as a leisure-time-pedagogue, for the older education, or a three to three-and-a-half year university education as a school-age educare teacher with the newer education. The other criterion was to be currently working in school-age educare-centres as a teacher for the children. Both female and male school-age educare teachers<sup>3</sup> participated. The oldest participant was born in 1949 and the youngest in 1988, while the professional experience varied from one year up to 35 years as a teacher in the profession. All teachers are given fictional names.

## Construction of data

The first step of the construction of data, the written narratives: In the written narratives, the school-age educare teachers were asked to tell about their motives for becoming school-age educare teachers, to describe their work and how they apply their intentions. 19 questions were sent by mail to the school-age educare teachers. The questions were directed towards their professional role, their mission, their educational attitude, their view on the curriculum and their intentions, and they were asked to provide examples of activities and describe how they accomplished these activities. The narratives were analysed by qualitative methods. Based on these analyses, ten school-age educare teachers were asked to take part in the walk-and-talk conversations together with one researcher.

The second step of the construction of data, the walk-and-talk conversations: Ten of the school-age educare teachers agreed to take part in an extended walk-and-talk conversation. In these conversations, the dialogue was conducted with the intention of providing prerequisites for the school-age educare teachers to have most of the speaking space. All the walks were carried out in the school-age educare-centre where the school-age educare teachers were working. The teachers received a digital camera and were encouraged to show and to take photos of places they related to, in response to questions asked by the researcher. The school-age educare teachers were asked questions about where they were the best teacher, the worst teacher, where they were the happiest teacher, the most boring, the most efficient, the strictest and finally, the most creative teacher. They brought the researcher to these places, both outdoors and indoors, took their photo, and were then asked to explain why they had chosen exactly that place and tell how they were acting in the chosen place. The conversations continued by the participants motivating and valuing their actions. One of the advantages with using walk-and-talk conversations is that the conversation is strongly situated in the setting, and this way of carrying out the dialogue provides prerequisites for the participating teacher to describe examples of situations that regularly occur in the identified place and this was done by all the participants. The conversations were

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3 Both the older leisure-time pedagogues and the younger school-age-educare teachers are called school-age educare teachers in the text henceforth.

recorded by a dictaphone. The length of the conversations varied, ranging between 23 minutes to 63 minutes.

The third phase of the data construction, the focus interviews: The focus interviews were framed by information gained from the written narratives. From the analysis of the written narratives, some main themes were discovered and they formed the basis for the focus interviews. The purpose was to let the participants talk about, discuss and reflect about the phenomenon researched in the study. The main themes were profession, leadership, organisation, bildung and values. Based on these themes, questions intended to follow up on the statements in the written narratives were constructed. The focus interviews were carried out in two school-age educare centres. The dialogue took place between two researchers and four school-age educare teachers. One of the researchers acted as moderator, and the other one added follow-up questions. The focus interviews were recorded by a dictaphone. The first focus interview lasted 1 hour 35 minutes and the second 1 hour 40 minutes.

### Procedures for organising and analysing the data

The first step: All the written narratives were brought together in one document and read repeatedly through both person by person and questions by question.

The second step: All the walk-and-talk conversations were transcribed. The conversations were read repeatedly person by person and question by question. The photos were used for underpinning the process of analysis.

The third step: Both focus interviews were transcribed and read repeatedly one by one and in relation to each other.

The data were initially read with the intention of letting the data speak to you. Then a more systematic phase followed with the purpose of revealing similarities and differences. When reading the data over and over again, certain formulations stood out. These notions were then possible to search for systematically by using a computer. The notions were see, presence, interaction, participation, influence, perspective, development, learning. This was one of the ways to discover how the teachers spoke about their professional position and their mission. Step by step, it was possible to see a pattern in the ways the school-age educare teachers spoke about their work.

### Ethics

The research conducted in this study was carried out in accordance with the Swedish Research Council's (2011) ethical principles for research concerning information, consent, confidentiality and use. The participants were given written information and gave their consent to participate. They are ensured confidentiality and the presentation is used with the aim of contributing with knowledge in scholarly and educational contexts.

## Trustworthiness

Perspective awareness, internal logic and consistency are quality criteria that must be observed to ensure scientific work (Larsson, 2005). This means that the researcher is responsible for explaining the different research moments and for motivating different choices of methods for data design and analysis. In the methodological section the different research moments are described and methods for design and analysis motivated. In order to illustrate my interpretations and analyses, I have reproduced certain parts of the empirical material, with the purpose of giving the readers access to the narratives of the participants. Larsson (2005) maintains that a key criterion for qualitative studies is the heuristic quality of the study and he explains that the reader through the presentation should be able to see some aspect of the reality in a new way. I assert that the reader is able to do this by the access to the narratives and to my analyses. Here the reader provides opportunity to, in communication with the text, interpret and understand the material and can also make own interpretations and adopt different perspectives as there is not one only truth or one way to perceive the reality.

Yet three criteria concerns qualities in the results: richness of meaning, structure and theory development (Larsson, 2005). I have clearly described the theory chosen and declared my perspectives, and I have hopefully presented the results in a structured and meaningful way.

According to Larsson (2005) there are five criteria concerning validity: discourse-criteria, heuristic value, empirical anchoring, consistency and a pragmatic criterion. A strength of the study is the method triangulation used and the coherence between different sources. A weakness is that the analyses have not been exposed to the participants validation. The results in this study is now subjected to convince members of the educational and the scientific community.

## Results

The school-age educare teachers in this study were asked to describe their professional position and their mission. The results will be presented as narratives under the following headlines; *Life-affirming attitude*, *To see and to be present*, *Activities emanating from cultural traditions and conscious choices*, *Giving or creating, contrasting perspectives* and *Extended education as the objective of school-age educare*. The narratives will firstly be introduced, and then illustrated by excerpts retrieved from the written narratives, the walk-and-talk conversations and/or the focus interviews. The excerpts will then be followed by an interpretation.

### Life-affirming attitude

In their written narratives, the teachers express a life-affirming attitude and use emotionally charged expressions. Their stories are grounded in value and emotionality. Their goal is joy. They say that they love the kids, they have the best job in the world, they share joy with the children every day. They also describe how they use jokes and fun as means for creating a happy atmosphere.

Magdalena gives voice to this in the walk-and-talk conversation when formulating:

Magdalena: ... this little fun-making fun ...

Magdalena is describing how she is using jokes and fun as ways to construct relationships with the children and also a non-prestigious position.

Magdalena: I think the children think it's funny when we adults dare to go the whole hog. – / / – When we adults make fun of ourselves.

That the adults are not afraid to let their adult prestige go and commit themselves to the children builds confidence and trust.

### To see and to be present

Several school-age educare teachers express the importance of seeing every child. Signhild emphasises that, "In groups, it is important that each child is seen". In the walk-and-talk conversation, she returns to the importance of looking every child in the eyes at the moment when they arrive at the school-age educare centre. The researcher is then challenging this statement.

Signhild: Just because I want every child to be seen.

Researcher: Yes, and what do you put in that? Do you really have time in that moment and do you have the opportunity to make sure...hmmm... that "I see in your eyes that you are not really happy. I see that you are totally happy"?

Signhild: Yes. Yes. Yes...

Researcher: Do you have time to perceive that in a hundredth of a second?

Signhild: Yes, or we are trying to...

Researcher: Yes.

Signhild: ... Because we divide the group so that we ... We try to do that.

Researcher: Hmmm.

Signhild: Then I cannot say that it is clear that it is after all ... No, we do that! ... That's what you want anyway! With it!

The researcher questions if Signhild really got the possibility to perceive the children's frames of minds when she looks into their eyes for a short instant. Then she explains that the teachers systematically have organised the educational activity and divided the children into smaller groups, so every teacher actually has the responsibility to greet a defined, smaller group of children in the whole group. She searches within herself, considering whether it really is so that she does this, and takes finally, with some reservations, a position that is indeed so.

Kim talks about his own presence when he is answering the question about where he is the worst teacher.

Kim: It contributes to a certain extent to ... Eh... Anyway, I am not present here.

He says that the place where he is worst teacher is in the play hall, for it is a little away from the other rooms, and there he is not present. That he sometimes is present there is because a child who wants him to intervene in a conflict picks him up.

Kim: "Remember this and this!" You think about yourself that you tend to be repetitive, and that is why ... one wishes to be more present. In this room.

Also in aesthetic activities Kim expresses a wish to be more present.

Kim: ...And then I feel I got to be more, ...yes, but it is needed that we can (said with emphasis) be more present also.

Kim explains that the reason for the teachers not being able to be more present is that the number of teachers for a group consisting of 40 children is just two, and the children play indoors, outdoors and in several different rooms at the same time.

The opportunities to see each child is limited by the possibilities of sharing responsibility between the school-age educare teachers, how the premises are located and it also depends on the content in the activities.

### Activities emanating from cultural traditions and conscious choices

The school-age educare teachers were also asked to tell about how they applied their intentions. The described activities could both emanate from a traditional way of choosing and conducting activities for children in school-age educare centres, and it could also be motivated from an educational stance. But above all, the teachers describe that they, regardless of the choice of activity, are consciously working with themselves as a role model.

Cecilia: I try to be a good role model. Talk much about how to behave towards each other. Spread security around me. Have a lot of material that children can use. Let the children choose what they want to do.

There are also teachers who speak about nature as a place for learning and development. When Desirée describes how she wants to realise her goals to encourage curiosity and creativity, create an environment where children feel happiness and security and challenge the children to try things they would not do otherwise, she mentions being out in nature.

Desirée: To be in the forest where there are opportunities to build huts and investigate animals and plants.

Both examples, to use yourself as a model and to use nature as a setting, can be seen as both emanating from the cultural tradition and as conscious choices. Both teachers also motivate their choice of activities in a compelling way that shows the logic between the mission, their intentions and the implementation of activities that can create conditions for the desired competencies you want the children to develop.

All teachers are talking about the close dialogue as a tool for all learning, but particularly for social learning. The location of this can be everywhere, both indoors and outdoors, but the place mentioned most often is the sofa (in all Swedish school-age educare centers there are usually gigantic sofas that almost always are big enough to accommodate the whole group of children). Hilma describes how she can initiate these conversations.

Hilma: "How do you stop the anger that begins inside the heart before it comes out into the arms and the legs?"

Gunnel and Alice clearly state that for whatever they want the children to learn, they try to adopt the children's perspectives.

To start from the child's perspective has always been a living tradition in the activity in the school-age educare centre and it is something that one today cares for more and more.

### Giving or creating, contrasting perspectives

In the narratives, some school-age educare teachers describe how they try to give the children a feeling of safety and how they provide prerequisites for meaningful leisure. Other teachers describe how they try to construct tools together with the children for them to use to create safety and meaningful leisure.

Julia gives her picture of the professional role of the school-age educare teacher in her written narrative.

Julia: A leader that provides safety. An adult to trust. Someone to laugh and cry with. A person who with knowledge grounded in policy documents and values, through good treatment, gives the children/pupils the possibility to develop into independent individuals who can manage and handle social interactions.

She starts out with expressing a taken-for-granted attitude that allocates to the teacher the agency to be the one acting and giving. However, when she continues, she also opens up for the teacher not just to give, but to arrange possibilities for the children to be able to act to develop the desired competencies.

But there are also school-age educare teachers describing a more clearly participating and process-directed perspective. Lykke, Magdalena and Nina express this in their written narratives.

Lykke: It is a human right to be a part of a whole, and this is an objective in the school-age educare. To include all individuals in our society and involve everybody in the values of the society is the sovereignty of the school-age educare centre.

Magdalena: In order to be able to create and to be able to construct a setting that stimulates development, it is a must to have good relationships.

Nina: To give them [the children] tools for further development and learning through playfulness and curiosity about life. -//- To be well-briefed in our policy documents and what is written in different reports, to update yourself continuously. To be able to be professional in your professional role and also prove the importance of the activity for children's development and learning. We work systematically towards our goals in our plan for high quality.

Nina is in her narrative emphasising the children's agency. And as she elaborates, she is describing an educational attitude and how she is realising her intentions in carefully chosen activities. But she is also emphasising the importance of curriculum and policy documents.

To sum up, the narratives presented above deal with how the school-age educare teachers describe their attitudes to their work, their intentions, and how they apply and execute them. We will now turn to how the school-age educare teachers talk about the objectives in the school-age educare.

## Extended education as the objective of school-age educare

The school-age educare teachers also answer questions about what they see as the most important tasks in the activity in the school-age educare centre. At the same time, these responses reveal what they think the children should learn and how.

When Cecilia describes her picture of the professional position, this description also coincides with her view on the objectives of school-age educare.

Cecilia: Greet and see every child. Give these children the possibility to take part in an inspiring, learning, challenging educare in the school-age educare centre. Provide different activities, both indoors and outdoors. Make plenty of room for play. Lead and support children to learn in all forms, above all in the social interaction with other people. Bring our educational attitude into the school.

In her description, she points out an extended learning in different forms, and gives special attention to play and interaction. Yet she also wants the listener to notice that there is a difference between the school-age educare centre and the school when it comes to the educational questions about what to learn and how to learn.

Ella's story also coincides with her description of her perception of the goals and intentions of the activity in the school-age educare centre.

Ella: The role at the school-age educare centre is essentially the one of a leader, one who guides the children towards knowledge and development. That you as a teacher do not have all the answers but help children themselves to reflect and find the answers. The role also includes caring for the children's interests and creating meaningful leisure, as the time in the school-age educare centre is children's leisure time. The role of the school-age educare teacher is also to teach social skills, to teach how to communicate with other people, to crack the social codes within play and to show what is proper behaviour towards other people. It also has the task of promoting good self-esteem and self-confidence among the children.

Briefly, Ella mentions knowledge, development, meaningful leisure, social competence, communication, social codes, self-esteem, self-confidence, and specifies both a child-oriented perspective and a different educational role.

Britt-Marie broadens this description when she points to her ambition of creating awareness about the surrounding world.

Britt-Marie: Help children become well-functioning global citizens.

## Analysis and discussion

The narratives focusing on a life-affirming attitude are possible to connect to Rancière's (1991) theories about care and love as an educational space between pupils and teachers. Just as the school-age educare teachers do, these prominent theorists speak about the importance of the gaze, viewing children with humility and appreciation and to greet the children. Rancière (1991) introduces the notion 'attention' for involving the child in this educational space and this notion builds upon an assumption of equality. Being attentive is the mode of a being who verifies equality and who is verified in its turn by other speaking beings. This is an educational stance that has serious consequences for how to understand not only the individual, but also society. Rancière declares that this is "the moral foundation of the power to know" (1991, p. 57).

When it comes to cultural traditions or conscious choices, several school-age educare teachers depict and motivate a clear choice of activities in their ambition to fulfil their intentions; intentions that at the same time emanate from the cultural traditions. In the narratives dealing with Giving or creating, contrasting perspectives on the question about agency in the activity makes itself visible. Is the activity imbedded in a context where the school-age educare teachers perceive themselves and the children as active agents who construct safety, meaningful leisure and other contents in the activity by their mutual interactions? Or is safety, meaningful leisure and other contents perceived as something inherited in the context and permanently existing inside the teachers and thereby possible to give to the children? In their narratives about 'Extended education' as the objective in school-age educare, the teachers reveal their views on how they perceive the significance of 'extended education'. They build this view not only on governmental policy documents and academic training, but also on cultural traditions and practical experience.

Is there an inner core in the profession of school-age educare teachers in Sweden? The results of this study indicate that there is. Throughout the three studies, the teachers speak more frequently about the same phenomena in the same way than in different ways. But how can we look at a common discourse? A professional discourse is said to unify the profession (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009), and here I want to highlight the importance of the shared training in the common teacher education as a significant aspect of the construction of consensus in the teacher's narratives. Since the Swedish teacher education consists of courses placed both in the practice of the school-age educare centres in combination with courses placed in the practice of the university, the development of practical knowledge, cultural traditions and theoretical knowledge in both these practices are embraced, guarded and analysed in the teacher education. In this way, the professionals already as students get used to and are trained to participate in and contribute to a common discourse characterised by the use of a professional language. By mastering a common professional language, the teachers get the prerequisites to develop the profession.

Expression of a common discourse can be seen both as good and bad. What might the benefits be? What can the disadvantages be? Lack of clarity can be revealed by studies about how school-age educare teachers describe their work, and they can highlight the need for clarification of the contents of the occupation. How can the role and the content of the work be developed by taking advantage of the common construction of discourse, where the professional role is handed down in practical work, where policy documents are a controlling component, where research contributes with new knowledge and where the teacher education is a significant actor and organiser of common dialogues? How do the processes of authoring work?

By naming the world around them, the participants in this study have claimed their voices and signed their own acts of authoring. The results from this study indicate that there is a commonly shared general discourse unifying the professional identity of the teacher in school-age educare centres. The teachers in school-age educare centres speak more frequently about the same phenomena in the same way than in different ways. To develop this common voice, the teachers rest in a culture constructed by a polyphony of voices. By participating in an everyday ongoing dialogue embedded in and surrounded by voices from policymakers, researchers, the union, visits from students learning to work in educare cen-

tres and their teachers from the teacher education and in concert with their colleagues, they have opportunities to author themselves. The creation of this construction of professional selves lies in the discourse developed in the practices. Clandinin (2007) maintains that the construction of a teacher identity is realised in an interaction between experience and the narrative about the teachers' living life as a basis for practice. The teacher identity is considered as a collective identity. Teachers have something in common that provides answers to the questions of who they are and what they know. According to Bakhtin (Holquist, 2002), it is impossible to voice oneself without appropriating the words of others. Narrative spaces, such as educare centres, become the intertextual ground for contesting the voices of others, reaccentuating their utterances with new meaning, and re-interpreting the self through others. Bakhtin describes this position of looking upon yourself as seen from without, by saying that the person does not look at himself with his own eyes but with the eyes of the world. The dialogical combination of the self and the other is described as a matter of constructing "the possible author of our own outside" (Holquist, 2002, p. 33). Holquist names this process, 'authoring' (p. 30), and he adds: "In order to forge a self, I must do it from the outside. In other words, I author myself" (p. 28). The results from this study show that the teachers towards work in school-age educare centres, although exposed to stated and unstated demands, lack of visions, unclear claims and subjected to a withdrawal of resources still speak with a common voice. This indicates that they still maintain a unified professional identity. The school-age educare teachers author themselves.

## Conclusion and suggestions for further study

This study indicates that the profession teachers towards work in school age educare centres provide a unique contribution to children's everyday lives by their faithfulness to the child's perspective. It would be interesting to deeper study in what way factors as new policy documents and changed teacher education influence the common discourse, or with other words, affect the processes of authoring. Another important finding is the life-affirming attitude the teachers expressed and it would be interesting to design a coming study that investigates strategies used by the teachers for supporting children's affirmation to life.

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