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(Review paper)

## SWEDISH PRESCHOOL CURRICULUM (SKOLVERKET) AS A MODEL IN THE PRESCHOOL EDUKATION SYSTEM

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**Abstract:** As part of a master's thesis on "*Preschool Curriculum in the Swedish Preschool Education System*" that challenged my research of preschool curriculum with my stay in Gothenburg (Sweden), as a preschool educator at Krumeluren 6 förskola Kindergarten. My goal is to give a complete picture of the important aspects of the preschool curriculum in Sweden as a quality model in the preschool education system. The preschool curriculum (Skolverket) in Sweden is designed to promote positive growth and development in the lives of all children, a holistic approach, to develop their social, physical, emotional and intellectual abilities. We know that every child is unique, and the special and positive experiences from early childhood are important for the overall development of the child in later life. The preschool curriculum in Sweden provides high quality education and care for children in a safe, respected and inclusive environment that builds a foundation for lifelong learning.

**Keywords:** preschool curriculum, preschool education, preschool institutions, lifelong learning, democracy.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Democracy, Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) are the foundation of Sweden's Early Childhood Education and Care (ESES) and have a major impact on the Skolverket for preschools.

"Democracy forms the basis of preschool education. Sweden's Education Law (2010: 800) stipulates that education in preschools aims for children to acquire and develop knowledge and values. It should promote the development and learning of all children and the lifelong desire to learn. The important task of preschools is to give and establish respect for human rights and the fundamental democratic values on which Swedish society is based. "

The curriculum is a model of the educational work through which the contents and goals are planned and realized, didactic-methodological processing of the activities for early learning, evaluation and assessment of the achievements and defining the competencies and expected results that the children acquire. The preschool curriculum is based on the child's attitude as

competent and with great internal resources, able to formulate his own theories about the world, to discover and explore its immediate surroundings and to develop confidence in their own abilities. Pedagogical work involves encouraging children to develop doubts, from hypotheses and theories, and to use their imagination, to observe, to seek answers, to give meaning to their everyday reality. It also deals with guiding, creating situations, and using opportunities that can challenge a child's thinking and theories. The curriculum is based on the view that children have their own rights and respect as individuals and members of society.

*The main vision of Swedish society is for all children to feel loved, respected and encouraged, to develop to their full potentia*

## **2. SWEDISH PRESCHOOL CURRIKULUM (SKOLVERKET)**

The first national curriculum (1998), (Lpfo 98, Skolverket) for preschools is very important for all educators. The educators liked that the preschool curriculum clearly describes the established traditions in early childhood education in Sweden.

The first part of the work plan is related to the section on norms and values in the curriculum. The national goals they strive for are: openness, respect, solidarity and responsibility, the ability to take into account and compassion for others - empathy, and a willingness to help others. Their ability to discover, think and use their position on different ethical dilemmas and fundamental issues of life in everyday reality, understanding that all people have equal value regardless of gender, social or ethnicity and respect for all forms of life. Adults are role models for children and children do a lot of what we adults do. Therefore, national goals express what we strive for.

In 1996, the responsibility for early childhood covered the age of 1 to 6 years and a transfer was made from the Ministry of Social Affairs to the Ministry of Education. Preschool education is integrated into the formal national education system and has become the first step in the lifelong learning process. At the same time, a new school uniform has been introduced, a preschool class for 6-year-olds. Following this transfer, in 1998 the first national preschool curriculum was issued year (Skolverket, 1998). This curriculum is based on a government decree and is therefore mandatory. The entire Swedish education system has since been covered by three curricula with a common vision for knowledge formation, development and learning. The theoretical starting point for the curriculum, ie the curriculum in preschool institutions, is socio-cultural and the approach is based on experience; children are considered active participants in their own development and learning.

In 2010, the curriculum was revised (National Education Engagement, 2011). New goals have been introduced and the learning dimension has been strengthened. Compared to the 1998 version, a stronger focus is on math, the emergence of first literacy, science and technology. However, not all of these domains are taught as a traditional formal school subject but as a structured thematic work to enable children to actively participate in the process. Preschools strive for each child to develop their curiosity and enjoyment, as well as their ability to play and learn. Playing is often associated with and perceived as a prerequisite for learning. Conscious use of the game to promote the development and learning of each individual is present in preschool institutions. This connection between play and learning is grounded in the curriculum, which

shows that play is the central part of a learning-oriented approach. But despite focusing on the game to promote learning in a conscious way, it is still not the case in all preschools in Sweden (Sheridan, Pramling Samuelsson, & Johansson, 2017; Skolinspektionen, 2018).

The new program (Skolverket, 2018) for preschool education states that in the preschool institutions the foundations have been laid for the development of the growing interests of children, to actively participate in society. Also, democracy, with the space for individual children to express their views and interests and be heard, has always been a major topic in Swedish preschool curricula. In addition to the right to express themselves, the new program emphasizes that children have the right to participate and influence. The active and creative participation of children in a social context are one of the most important foundations for their learning. Children's perspectives relate to children's own experiences, understanding and contribution, while children's perspectives represent what adults are trying to understand about children's attitudes and their world.

The Curriculum for Preschool Institutions (Läroplan för förskolan Lpfö 18) emphasizes the importance of preschools as a first step in lifelong learning. Under established laws, individual municipalities are free to decide how to carry out their preschool activities. The curriculum sets out core values and tasks, national goals and preschool guidelines. The educational principles of the curriculum are based on the assumption that care and education go hand in hand. A good caring environment is essential for development and learning, while caring in itself provides educational content. The curriculum also emphasizes the importance of play in the child's learning and development and the child's own active participation. Preschools should be fun, safe and educational for all children. In many countries, there is a tendency to set goals and assess the progress of preschool children, but the Swedish system focuses more on core values, such as play, tolerance, and thinking about others. The curriculum for Swedish preschools does not include goals for individual children and their progress in learning at certain stages, but stimulates and supports the learning of each preschool child and requires knowledge of each child's development. Knowledge that is specific to children should not be used to categorize or compare children, but to contribute to the planning of all preschool education and its activities. The basic areas that make up the preschool curriculum are:

- Key features (fundamental values) of preschool education in Sweden
- Holistic view
- Play as a basis for development, learning and well-being
- Communication and creativity
- Sustainable development, health and well-being
- Care, development and learning
- Continuous development of preschool education

The curriculum for preschools was revised in 2010 with clear goals for the development of children in language, mathematics, science and technology. The guidelines for employee responsibilities were clarified, both at the individual level of educators and at the team level. New sections for monitoring, evaluation and development and the responsibilities of the heads of preschool institutions have been added. The starting point for this revision is that the preschool curriculum should have a similar structure as the curriculum of other school forms. The

curriculum for 2019 has been adjusted in accordance with current national strategies and legislation, such as the Education Law (Skollagen SFS 2010: 800). The concepts of education and teaching are also included in the curriculum to emphasize that the preschool is part of the school system. The language and text of the curriculum have been revised in terms of democracy and gender equality. Great emphasis is placed on basic values and that preschool education should reflect the values expressed in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The concept of care is included in several places in the curriculum to clarify that care, development and learning are a whole in preschool. Based on the government's national digital strategy for the school system, the revised program states that education should give children the opportunity to develop digital skills through understanding the digitalization they face in their daily lives.

In addition to the curriculum, the preschool may have its own policy documents or work plans, which may expand, focus, or specify its orientation or working methods if there is no conflict with the curriculum. These documents can be considered as a supplement to the national program in certain preschool institutions. The staff in the preschool institutions determines how the goals of the curriculum should be achieved in accordance with the set frameworks and laws and that the work promotes the development and learning of each child.

The curriculum is based on the idea that preschoolers learn mainly through their own activities in contexts that are natural and meaningful to them. With the help of a topic-based method, children are given the opportunity to explore, experiment, with music, drama, art, crafts, play to talk, sing and more. They can understand their experiences, step by step gain new knowledge and insights. Children can learn more about a particular area through books and listening to stories. The preschool curriculum states that education should enable children to experience, form, and communicate through a variety of aesthetic expressions such as image, form, drama, movement, song, music, and dance. Children need to be able to design, shape and create using a variety of materials and techniques. The daily activity should include the whole group of children, as well as take place in the form of organized or spontaneously formed smaller groups for various activities. Every child's development and learning should be supported in close collaboration between preschool education and home.

Some preschools use alternative pedagogical methods, such as Montessori, Waldorf, and others. Some specialize in areas such as sports, science, art and crafts, computers, nature and ecology, and some spend most of their time outdoors in the so-called "Ur och skur förskola" (Open School) where activities such as artistic and pedagogical work, as well as meals, etc., take place outdoors, near the preschool or in nature. The child's self-esteem and identity develop in interaction with other children and adults. That is why it is important for the children's group to create conditions for each child to socialize with other children and staff. Preschools can have better prerequisites for achieving the goal when teaching based on the curriculum takes place in different ways during the day in the children's group. Part of meeting the goals in preschool is to ensure that children with a mother tongue other than Swedish have the opportunity to develop Swedish and their mother tongue.

The structure of the curriculum makes it easy for preschoolers, parents, and children to see the continuity of the school system. The curriculum begins with a chapter on fundamental values, the task of the preschool, and definitions of the concepts of knowledge and learning. As a

democratic country, Sweden believes that education plays an important, if not the most important, role in raising children in democratic countries. The following basic values ensure the democratic foundation of Swedish society: "Anyone who works with preschool children should promote respect for the essential value of each person, as well as respect for our environment." Preschool educators support these values and take action when faced with a challenge. Sweden, as a multicultural society, promotes the official policy of integration and coexistence, multiculturalism is an advantage and a variation where the majority has become normal. All citizens should be offered equal opportunities to participate in Swedish society in terms of rights, obligations and opportunities.

The second chapter of the curriculum is goals and guidelines. The goals in the curriculum of preschool institutions are set as goals that are targeted. They set guidelines for the work of preschool institutions and contain goals for quality development in preschool institutions.

There are five sections in this chapter: the first section deals with norms and values, reiterating the importance of early childhood education for the upbringing of democratic children. The next part is development and learning. The educational responsibility of preschool institutions is clearly stated here, emphasizing the pedagogical task, which is one of the main political ideas in the reform. The other parts are called: the influence of the child, the preschool institution and the home, and cooperation with the preschool group, the school and after the school center. Also, this section defines the goals to be achieved, which monitors the responsibility of assessing each child in terms of grades and grading.

### **3. ONE DAY IN THE KINDERGARTEN „ KRUMELUREN 6 FÖRSKOLEN”**

Krumeluren 6 förskola Kindergarten in Gothenburg opens at 6 am, when the children arrive. Upon arrival at the kindergarten, the children greet the educators and everyone present at the moment. After the first greeting, the children enter the building, ritually removing their shoes and coats, putting them in place. The children come in and stay barefoot only in socks. During this time, educators and kindergarten staff talk to their parents as needed. Also, at that time, the parents of the children tell the educators how long the child will be in kindergarten that day. Educators and children gather together in the square in the kindergarten where they are talking. Each educator welcomes his group of 6 to 7 children and they sit together at a table where they have breakfast. Breakfast is a very important meal - it can either make or break your day. The children serve themselves and use cutlery, a knife and a fork. After breakfast, they and their educators tidy up where they eat.

The groups are formed so that three educators have 6-7 children in a group in one playroom. Before the activity begins, the children ask themselves, each individual what he wants to play and with what. During this time, educators prepare for daily activities. Children decide to draw in an atelier, in a design room, manipulative games, or a literary recreation center where children read and review picture books. After a while, each educator works with his children. If a child shows a desire and interest to switch to another educator, permission is obtained and the groups are exchanged. Meanwhile, the children are served a variety of fruits that must be present in the kindergarten every day. Educators do not hold targeted activities every day, but only three days a week, for example, on Monday and Friday there are free reflective activities, and on Tuesdays and Thursdays there are targeted activities that are pre-determined. Sports activities are

scheduled for Wednesday. After the activity, the children sit in a "samling" circle and the educator asks each child individually to find their name that was previously written and pasted on the wall, to find the time of year, day and date, the flag and the state from where is coming.

The children's lunch is served from 11.00 and 11.30 depending on the age of the children. The food served is from a restaurant, and the chefs make sure that every week there is a varied meal rich in vitamins and minerals. The fish is on the menu three times a week, and the remaining days are reserved for soups and vegetable stews. After lunch, the children go out for about two hours, regardless of the weather, and play free games in contact with nature. Since it was winter, the children were dressed in special spacesuits and rubber boots so they could play outside without interruption. Older children (4-6 years) do not have a passive rest, ie do not sleep in kindergarten, only younger children, but still they return inside the kindergarten where children have a small snack (snack) consisting of several types of wholemeal pastries, butter , vegetables, milk or fruit yogurt, the choice is made by the child himself. Those children whose parents have announced that they will leave at a certain time are sent by the educators, and the other children who leave later sit down again for a "samling" and talk or play calm games together until they leave kindergarten.

Norra Hilsingen, where the preschool is located, is a place for democracy and learning. All preschools aim to work with project-oriented and educational documentation to increase children's impact on their learning. It is based on the available management documents, Skulverket for LPFÖ Preschool 18. It, together with the school law and the goals of local politicians, is the governing body of the preschool. Gothenburg's business concept for preschools is:

- Children's inner motivation and desire to learn
- Participation and co-creation
- Holistic view

Educational documentation in educators is a way to monitor children's learning and ongoing processes, including photography, film, observation, and thinking, along with children, parents, and colleagues. A way to monitor the development of quality in the preschool institution.



Picture1. (children in kindergarten)

The content of an activity in a preschool institution is decided together with the children and the educators, and it starts with one's own thoughts and questions from the educators to the children and their attempts at communication must be obeyed. This way of looking at children is inspired by the educational philosopher Loris Malaguchi, one of the founders of preschools in Reggio Emilia, Italy. Educators are aware and listen to the many languages of children, ignore assumptions and involve children in communication. This includes learning how to argue, negotiate and criticize. . Children are no longer considered objects to be cared for by adults, but they are active intentional subjects. Their knowledge building comes from their own experiences. Early childhood education is for the child to get to know himself and others and to develop a personal identity and understanding of the world around him. It is important for children to feel involved and influential .They need to be seen and felt valued as part of the group, so they will want to share and be involved in what is happening. In order for the child to feel that he or she can participate and have an impact on the preschool day, it is important that educators and other children listen to them. In high-quality preschools, children are aware of their participation and that they influence everyday life.

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