Everyday practice at the Sunflower: the staff’s representations and governing strategies as contributions to the order of discourse

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Abstract

Swedish leisure-time centres were formerly part of Swedish social and family policies but were transferred to an educational context in the 1990s. This transfer was accentuated by both the Education Act of 2010 and the new teacher training established in 2011, which also included education particularly directed for leisure-time centres. The state’s intention with this discursive shift was to highlight education and learning within the activity in a more distinct way. This article is based on an ethnography-inspired study at one leisure-time centre called the Sunflower. The data are based on six weeks of field work including participating observations, field notes and walk-and-talk conversations. The study takes its point of departure from representations by staff concerning what they emphasise regarding the centre’s activity, how these representations are related to each other and which strategies staff members use when talking about and monitoring the pupils’ activities. The results show the strong presence of older traditions concerning values and practices regarding the performance at work: supporting children with good care, stressing the importance of children’s free play and using a peripheral subject position during work. The results also show that a stress on the child-to-staff ratio as circumscribing the activity which is enhanced by the pupils misallocated age distribution.

Keywords: leisure-time centres, social constructionism, ethnography, discourses, governing strategies

Introduction

Leisure-time centres are institutions that were previously seen as part of Swedish social and family policies and as a complement to parenting. Rohlin (2001) asserts that leisure-time centres, and the education for leisure-time pedagogues, were formerly influenced by pre-school and that the activities were supposed to support social development. However, governmental responsibility concerning school-age ‘educare’ was transferred from the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs to the Ministry of Education and Science in 1996. Its belonging to the educational arena was accentuated by the Education Act of 2010 (SFS 2010: 800) and a discursive shift was implied since school-age educare is now described as education and, furthermore,
the children are described as pupils. School-age educare is now supposed to stimulate the pupils' learning while also offering meaningful leisure and recreation. Education directed for work in leisure-time centres has, in conformity with the Education Act, also changed during the last few years. Teacher training for leisure-time centres in particular was established in 2011 and, therefore, leisure-time centres should by now be well-established institutions in the educational context.

By using a steering document such as the Education Act, the state can change or stress the direction of institutional work. From a sociologic constructionist perspective (Gergen 1999), the state uses a certain technology for orchestrating the activity, governmentality (cf. Rose 1996; Miller and Rose 2008). This governmentality should be understood “in the broad sense of techniques and procedures for directing human behaviour. Government of children, government of souls and consciences, government of a household, of a state, or of oneself” (Foucault 1997, 81). The discursive shift towards education and learning should be seen as the state’s effort to change the content of the activity and this is complemented by the Swedish Schools Inspectorate’s (2010) report where 77 leisure-time centres were studied. It recommended that the design of school-age educare be adjusted to stimulate children’s learning and development in a more distinct way and not only comprise free play. More diversified, prepared activities including “courses” to enhance learning opportunities were also advocated. Such policy initiatives cannot, however, be translated without problems. Policy texts are transformed when they are mediated through “pre-existing institutional infrastructure composed of groups and individuals” (Ball 1994, 64) and could be seen as ‘leaky’ since different actors at different levels interpret the documents in varying ways (Apple 2004).

School-age educare has been repeatedly evaluated by the Swedish National Agency for Education (e.g. in 2000, 2006 and 2008). The Agency stated already in the year 2000 that budgetary cuts, integration with schools, and the size and composition of groups have affected quality. Statistical data from the Swedish National Agency (3 July 2014) indicate that the child-to-staff ratio has continued to increase significantly although the National Agency for Education has regularly criticised this development. The statistical data show that in 1999 on average there were 17.8 children for every staff member. The child-to-staff ratio then increased to 21.3 in 2013 and the average number of pupils in the groups also increased from 30.1 in 2003 to 40.4 in 2013. The child-to-staff ratio was also part of the Swedish Schools Inspectorate’s (2010) major criticism directed at leisure-time centre activity. In its investigation, it emphasised that municipalities have to ensure that the child-to-staff ratio, physical environment and organisation are designed in such a way that good care and sound pedagogical quality can be provided.

This article will investigate everyday practice in one leisure-time centre and study how everyday practice is produced and reproduced and in that way complement findings from the recurring surveys. In particular, focus is directed at the following
research questions: i) What are the practices that staff routinely engage in with regard to the pupils’ activities? ii) How do staff describe the centre’s activity, and which discourses do they use in defining its purposes and values? iii) How do the practices and representations of these practices construct a framework for governing the pupils’ activities?

**Previous research**

The first doctorate thesis in Sweden focusing on leisure-time pedagogues and leisure-time centres was written by Johansson (1984). He portrayed everyday practice at leisure-time centres as a variation of free play, structured activities such as circle time, sports, pottering, playing board games and snack time. The most essential goal of leisure-time centre activity in the 1980s was to support parents by offering good care. Similar reflections were described about 10 years later (Jansson 1992; Evaldsson 1993; Ursberg 1996). Evaldsson’s study showed that the staff at the two centres she researched had similar types of educational goals, shared the same types of cultural norms, worked in similar ways and shared many of the daily work routines. She connected this pedagogical approach to an overall ambition to provide children with meaningful activities. These activities such as reading, painting, sewing etc. could be seen as a way to educationalise children’s leisure. Jansson and Ursberg asserted that there was a certain leisure-time centre culture comprised of common features. Jansson claimed that this culture was made up of safety for the children, self-containment and characteristic features of Swedish culture and child-rearing while Ursberg approached leisure-time centre activity as being grounded in a common Nordic child-minding culture where care, fostering and children’s personal development are stressed. Similarly, Pálsdóttir (2012, 26) claims that a distinct Nordic pedagogical discourse is based in a social pedagogy that aims to “encourage the overall development of the child”. When after-school services in Iceland, Denmark, Sweden and Norway are compared, she stresses that these services are structured in different ways even if the countries seem to share the same pedagogy. Although after-school services are increasingly considered part of the school system in these Nordic countries, the legislation, aims and staff qualifications differ (Pálsdóttir 2012). Sweden should be seen as the Nordic country where the integration of school and after-school service is the most developed since the Swedish curriculum for elementary school also encompasses school-age educare and because of the teacher training directed at this activity.

The closer connection between leisure-time centres and school drew some research attention to the outcome of the collaboration and mutual practice that were evolving between leisure-time pedagogues and teachers during school time (see, for example, Calander 1997, 1999; Hansen 1999; Gustafsson 2003; Haglund 2004). This research took a staff perspective as its point of departure and showed that the leisure-time pedagogues and leisure-time centre activity were not usually a priority
of the collaboration between schools and leisure-time centres (also see Foss (2011) concerning Norway). For many years, research into everyday practice at leisure-time centres after school was not prioritised. However, school-age educare has recently attracted some research attention. The notion of leisure within leisure-time centres was discussed by Haglund (2009) and Haglund and Anderson (2009). Haglund argued that different discourses exist concerning leisure at leisure-time centres and that, based on which discourse is the most powerful, design and content could diverge between different leisure-time centres. Haglund and Anderson discuss the organisation of US after-school programmes and Swedish leisure-time centres and argue that leisure and learning should not be mutually exclusive in either the after-school programmes or leisure-time centres. Dahl (2011) and Dahl and Ackesjö (2011) tried to move close to the children’s perspective and thereby understand children’s social life at leisure-time centres. Dahl argues that the studied children develop different community practices that endure over time and that various alliances emerge in these communities. The children negotiate through the alliance using different strategies aiming to obtain access or to secure their interaction space. Dahl and Ackesjö studied why children wanted to terminate their stay at two leisure-time centres (enacted of course by the parents). The children’s answers highlighted a lack of friends, difficulties in influencing the activity and that the activities and staff’s attention were mostly directed at the youngest children as reasons to terminate their stay. Learning opportunities at leisure-time centres are discussed by Jensen (2011) and Saar, Löfdahl and Hjalmarsson (2012). Jensen argues that learning in leisure-time centres mostly takes place as informal learning, where learning is often a result of participating in voluntary activities. Learning in school is, on the other hand, mainly structured in a way that is labelled formal learning, planned and mandatory activities aimed at specific outcomes. Saar et al. also argue that learning opportunities in leisure-time centres differ from learning in school but leisure-time centres and schools are, however, depicted as a unity when these institutions are evaluated. This has led to a situation where the content in leisure-time centres has been judged with school as a norm for how a pedagogical activity should appear.

A brief recapitulation of research directed at school-age educare would entail arguing that leisure-time centre activity is not well researched and is, in several aspects, theoretically undeveloped. For these reasons, our knowledge concerning staff representations of leisure-time centre activity and their strategies to enhance pedagogical quality, children’s learning and development is insufficient.

**Theoretical points of departure**

The study’s theoretical point of departure originates in a social constructionist perspective, which asserts that social reality is constructed through the interactions of people (Burr 2003; Fairclough 2010), implying that social practice is a consequence of human perception and their attempts to structure, label, and categorise the world.
Actors produce and reproduce everyday social practices through mutual negotiations based on their understandings of what their own subject positions mean. This point of departure relates to both Anthony Giddens’ theory of structuration and Norman Fairclough’s critical discourse theory which will be briefly described in the subsequent paragraphs.

A structure, according to Giddens (1979, 1984), be seen as both a general term and structuring properties that bind space-time within social systems. A social system, such as a leisure-time centre, can thus be seen as a pattern of recurrent practices and social relations that are maintained across time-space. From this perspective, leisure-time centre activity is both a consequence of and a medium for the social practice the staff and the children participate in. When actors, for example leisure-time pedagogues, produce and reproduce structures, they are also recreating the conditions concerning the social practice they are involved in. Giddens (1984) also introduces the concept of the duality of structure to describe how an actor, for instance a leisure-time pedagogue, is not pre-determined to act in a certain way or bound by existing societal structures. Nor can an actor be seen as an undependable creator of the existing society. When governmental policy texts are consumed and interpreted in everyday work, they are also translated and understood in relation to existing leisure-time centre practice. For that reason, governmental techniques and procedures for directing social practices at, for example, leisure-time centres are not seen as an external force which solely determines the activity (cf. Ball 1994).

According to Giddens’ theory of structuration (1984), all actors are seen as knowledgeable agents – they know what they are doing and why they are doing it through the use of reflexive monitoring of conduct. Giddens (1979, 1984) describes this knowledge as practical consciousness and discursive consciousness. Giddens does not make a clear demarcation between the two forms of consciousness, but asserts that practical consciousness is often tacit while discursive consciousness is described as “...knowledge which actors are able to express on the level of discourse” (Giddens 1979, 5). The monitoring of conduct becomes evident through the actors’ use of rules and resources. Rules are described as unwritten prescriptions which exist in social practices. These prescriptions are a form of legitimisation concerning the actual practice while resources (authoritative resources and allocative resources) are seen as capacities that actors can use to change the social environment (Giddens 1984). Giddens also asserts that some locales, settings for interactions, can be more difficult to change than others since they are regionalised. A room can be regionalised since the social practice in that room always, or at a certain point in time, can differ from the social practice in other rooms. This means that actors are deeming some rooms in a locale, for example a school, as more central than others and also establish themselves in these spaces.

Fairclough (1992, 2010) suggests that critical discourse analysis “… looks to establish connections between properties of texts, features of discourse practice (text
production, consumption and distribution), and wider sociocultural practice” (2010, 88–89). A discourse can be seen as a particular way of representing a part of the world. This means that discourses contribute to describing and constituting our representations concerning the world and also contribute to constructing our social identities and subject positions. Discourses contribute in that way to the reproduction of existing social structures but also to their transformation. When actors speak about their representations, Fairclough (1992) denotes this as discursive practice. Discursive practice is based on how actors, for example leisure-time pedagogues, interpret their responsibilities and the policy documents that describe the intentions for leisure-time centres. Fairclough (2010) stresses the importance of theorising the conventions underlying the various ways of representations since they can involve different social conflicts. These conventions can be described as the order of discourse, for instance the variety of ways different actors speak of the leisure-time centre. The order of discourse can be defined as the totality of the different discursive practices and the relationships between them. Since different ways of representing the world often exist there also exist alternative, and sometimes competing, discourses (Fairclough 2003). The relationships between and within orders of discourse therefore involve different social conflicts and struggle since “some ways of making meaning are dominant or mainstream in a particular order of discourse” (Fairclough 2010, 265).

The point of departure in this article is, first and foremost, to discuss the production and reproduction of everyday practice from the perspective of staff members in one leisure-time centre. The focus of this study therefore emphasises their view of the centre’s “inner logic”, their strategic conduct (Giddens 1984) and their representations of the work in the shape of prominent discourses and the local order of discourse (Fairclough 2010).

Methodology

Data collection and analysis

The study was designed as a qualitative case study where data from one leisure-time centre are analysed. The study is inspired by ethnography (Emerson and Pollner 2001; Hammersley and Atkinson 2007) and comprised six weeks of field work where pupils and staff accounts and actions were studied. The data collection, a process of co-constructing the data with the participants through interpretation of talk and observations, is based on participating observations after school “involving encounters between a known, identified researcher and hosts who are aware of the fact of being studied” (Emerson and Pollner 2001, 243), field interviews “which are [compared to formal interviews] spontaneous and generally more focused on immediate or recent experiences of some specific event which both the speaking subjects have some experience of” (Beach 1997, 32) and field notes, i.e. writing down scenes and settings, including the content of the spontaneous field interviews and,
in that way, describing the social practice (Atkinson 2001). The observations were carried out between 12:30 and 17:00, two or three days a week over 6 weeks. The ambition was to observe and take notes concerning everyday practice at the leisure-time centre during afternoon activity. In that way, it was possible to study staff relations:

... with themselves and with others, the practices which both were their correlate and condition of possibility, and enabled these relations to be acted upon. Not who they were, but who they thought they were, what they wanted to be, the languages and norms according to which they judged themselves and were judged by others, the actions they took upon themselves and that others might take, in the light of those understandings (Miller and Rose 2008, 7).

The observations became a tool to understand the leisure-time centre called the Sunflower as a social system. By studying the everyday practice and the actors’ use of rules and resources, it became possible to examine the staff’s practical consciousness, which is mostly seen as tacit (Giddens 1984).

In addition to the data collection mentioned above, audio-taped walk-and-talk conversations (Haglund and Klerfelt 2013) with three staff members were also carried out in the last week of the study. The staff had the opportunity to choose if they wanted to participate alone or together during these conversations. Evelyn and Caroline chose to carry out the walk-and-talk conversation together, while Mary completed it alone. During the conversations, they were asked questions concerning, for example, where they were needed most, where they were the best pedagogues, where they thought the pupils learned most etc. The questions aimed at creating opportunities to discuss social practice and, in that way, verbally illuminate and elaborate the understanding of the observed social practice. The questions were designed to stimulate the informants to show the different rooms and spaces where they participated in different activities during their work. The questions opened up for a discussion of the leisure-time centre activity and the practices the staff engaged in at the places they showed. They were also urged to take photos of the various places they showed and talked about. These places often became the starting point for many of the dialogues during the walk-and-talk conversations. The camera was used as a stimuli for conversation and the photos functioned as a complement to the content of the audio-taped material and as support for the observations. The audio-taped walk-and-talk conversations were transcribed and later analysed together with the field notes.

The analysis has been an ongoing process “... which has to do with pattern recognition toward the development of theories or ideas which provide reasonable notions of what the key features of a particular situation or set of instances can be conceived as” (Beach 1997, 37). This process started by writing down the field notes trying to recognise patterns in the everyday practice. The walk-and-talk
conversations were realised during the end of the fieldwork and the walk-and-talk data were analysed by being compared to the field notes. This means trying to find which discourses, i.e. which particular ways of representing school-age educare, are drawn upon in the data material and how they are articulated together. This implies looking for dialectical relations between discourses and other objects or moments and later analyse the “internal relations” of discourse (Fairclough 2010). Finding dialectical relations implies, in this study, finding relations between discourses, activities, forms of consciousness and time and place in the data material through repeated reading of the data. These components are dialectically related since they are “different elements but not discrete, fully separate, elements. There is a sense in which each ‘internalizes’ the others without being reducible to them” (Fairclough 2001, 231). Finding internal relations of discourse means analysing the most prominent discourses, i.e. discourses that are seen as influencing, and in what way they influence, the everyday practice. It also implies analysing how these discourses are articulated together, i.e. analysing how these, possible competing, discourses are related to each other and revealing the variety of ways the staff speak about the leisure-time centre, the local order of discourse.

The setting
At the time of the study, about 300 pupils aged between 6 and 15 attended Beech school which was situated in an area of rental apartments in a small Swedish town. The school was chosen since it was well-established and situated in an easily accessible area. According to Michael, the principal, about 30% of the children had parents who had moved to Sweden from other countries. Only one of the two leisure-time centres at Beech school was studied. This centre will be called the Sunflower and it was chosen because two of three staff members were leisure-time pedagogues whose training focused on work at leisure-time centres. This was seen as important since, on account of their training, they should be seen as knowledgeable agents concerning leisure-time centre activities. The staff at the other leisure-time centre, the Blueberry, and the third member of staff at the Sunflower had different types of education directed at working with children but not focused on working with children at leisure-time centres. The staff at the Sunflower consisted of Mary and Evelyn who became leisure-time pedagogues in the 1980s, and Caroline who became a junior high school civics teacher in 2006. These staff members managed the Sunflower where most (25 of 40) pupils were 6 or 7 years of age.

Results
The production and reproduction of everyday practice and the order of discourse will be described and discussed with the help of four prominent discourses which appeared in the data collection. These discourses will be discussed under the following sub-headings: Supporting pupils’ play and basic needs; The child-to-staff
ratio as a structuring feature, Surveillance as strategic conduct; and The locale as regionalised areas.

**Supporting pupils’ play and basic needs**

When staff at the Sunflower described their work and what they regarded as important, they emphasised the opportunities to have conversations with the children. Conversations were seen as a way of meeting and getting in touch with the pupils and, in that way, acknowledging them and making them feel comfortable and safe.

Mary: Yes, well I feel that to a great extent, that you should be someone who, that you should pick up on the children if there is a need. Eh... like in the afternoon, how things have been and you want to be the one who gets eye contact with them, ‘Is everything OK?’ sort of. Is anyone in need of like... that you are a supporting adult... that in some way instil safety, I think.

Mary wants to comprehend how they feel and be an available adult if someone is in need of support. She describes a basic concern for the pupils’ well-being. When staff members described or discussed activities that were beneficial, they emphasised free play first of all in the walk-and-talk conversations, i.e. play that was initiated and conducted by the pupils and not the structured activities administered by the staff. Moreover, they asserted that pupils had many opportunities for learning in the centre’s activity and that learning and development were seen as important but the staff did not deem themselves to be crucial with respect to being actuating in that process. The learning that might occur during play was, first and foremost, dependent on the interaction among the pupils.

Mary: I believe children learn a lot from other children, or I know that children learn from each other. Children learn a lot from each other... what they should do. They observe each other a lot and most of all if there are older children and children who perhaps are, who have, who are good at playing or who are good at... doing fun things. They watch, they look up to these children.

The staff’s distant subject position was not circumscribed to the Sunflower or the school yard. This position was also noticed during an excursion to a pond in the neighbourhood.

When we reached the pond Mary gathered the pupils. She asked the pupils to squat and then she started to inform them of what we were going to do. One of the girls, Maria, turned away her head, rose and took a few quick steps to the waterline and shouted ‘Look a bug!’.

Some of the pupils who thus far had been quiet and listened to Mary turned around and went to see the bug. Mary smiled and looked as if she had missed the moment but after a while she continued with giving some information of what was allowed to do and recommendations to be careful. The pupil explored the surroundings in small groups, of their own decision, equipped with tucks, binoculars and glass jars if they wanted to.
They played and/or tried to catch different insects in the water and along the shore while the staff mostly talked to each other and observed what was happening. Now and then the staff interacted with the pupils and supported them if they needed it but the pupils were mostly self-acting (Field notes, September 2012).

Free play and a basic concern for the pupils’ well-being were therefore important parts of social practice and, in that way, were legitimised with the same unwritten prescriptions (Giddens 1984) as during the 1980s and 1990s. These rules, or unwritten prescriptions, thereby recreate similar conditions concerning social practice as were described 20 years ago (Jansson 1992; Evaldsson 1993; Ursberg 1996). The staff’s subject position in everyday practice corresponds to these older prescriptions despite official educational and discursive changes towards a subject position that stimulates children’s learning and development in a more distinct way (cf. Swedish Schools Inspectorate 2010). This older position is highlighted in a field interview where Mary states that she once studied to be a leisure-time pedagogue and not a teacher and that she still wants to work as a leisure-time pedagogue.6 This indicates striving for a peripheral subject position that differs from a traditional teaching position.

The child-to-staff ratio as a structuring feature
The large number of pupils was mentioned many times during the field work, and it was commented on as a way of explaining social practice and why the staff acted as they did. It was argued that one reason for always going out to the schoolyard after the afternoon snack was that it was easier to manage all the pupils outdoors. The child-to-staff ratio also caused difficulties meeting all pupils’ needs and expectations. Both Mary and Evelyn argue that the child-to-staff ratio, where the majority are 6 or 7 years old and their need for more support defines the centre’s activity. Mary asserts that there is not enough time to offer the older pupils what they really would have wanted. She says that:

I think they would need, I think that they would be much more absorbed in challenges, that you could perform more directed activities perhaps take a bicycle ride. Show them the environment in another way or the supply or . . . ehhh, little more ehhh . . . activities that are adapted for them that are a bit more challenging.

She cannot support the older pupils as much as she wants. Evelyn agrees that the older pupils are not in need of support in the same way as the 6- to 7-year-old pupils are.

Evelyn: Yes, you can give them responsibility in a different way and . . . Yes. Because I think you notice that a lot of things happen concerning the younger children from a security point of view. They are so small.
It was previously indicated that the staff’s subject position corresponded with older prescriptions of how to perform their work (cf. Rohlin 2001). At the same time, the child-to-staff ratio and the fact that the majority of the pupils were only six or seven years old were seen as having an impact on what was possible to include in the centre’s activity.

One afternoon Lois, 9 years, asked me to follow her to her classroom. She was going to do her homework and she wanted some company. She finished her homework rather fast and when we left the classroom I notice that the pupils are dispersed in the different rooms as usual. Maria, Isa and Ahmed play one board game and Fiona and Elisabeth use another one. Most of the board games are placed in a shelf in the main room. They are easy to access, popular and often used by the pupils. Now and then some of the staff members sit down and play with them as well (Field notes, October 2012).

However, the structuration of what is possible to do in the centre’s activity becomes visible when Mary mentions a locked cupboard and the board games that are stored there. These board games are only used on special occasions, during school holidays when there are fewer pupils at the leisure-time centre.

Mary: We only bring out those games together sometimes. Yes, you can’t do them on your own so you more or less need an adult to play. The other games we’ve got here, we have sort of trained the children to play without an adult. Yes. So in that way they are very available, you can just pick a game. But the games that are locked away are a little bit more … they need more explaining.

The board games were divided into two groups. The games in the locked cupboard were more time-consuming and more difficult to understand than the easily accessible games the pupils usually played. The existing structure implied difficulties in meeting the general recommendations made by the National Agency for Education (2007) to stimulate the pupils’ development and learning and offer meaningful leisure and recreation. The younger pupils were in greater need of care than the somewhat older pupils and the latter were, in some respects, left on their own since there were no staff members available to provide them with suitable challenges and support their development.

**Surveillance as strategic conduct**

Surveillance, or the tracking of pupils, means knowing where everybody is, when pupils will be picked up by their parents and making sure that everyone has something to do and seems to be all right. The repeated attendance checks (before the pupils finish school, during circle time, when they enter the dining hall and finally noting when they leave the leisure-time centre) is strategic conduct (Giddens 1984) used to maintain surveillance. The pupils are, to a large extent, free to choose what to do and which room they want to use in the locale which means that they
move between different spaces. For that reason, staff track them now and then to make sure that everyone is doing well. Mary asserts that the main room has advantages concerning the possibilities for monitoring the activities at the Sunflower.

Mary: ... there is a reason why you are in here a lot. You have quite a good overview. If you look at it all, all the doors have windows so you can walk around and check things out.

The doors leading to the classrooms were often shut and there seemed to be two reasons for this: first, it was a way of keeping noise levels down and, second, as previously mentioned, it was a way of giving the pupils space to play on their own during free play, something the staff strived for. The pupils were, however, not left unmonitored since staff could look through windows in the doors and check that everything seemed to be all right. Yet the monitoring was not confined to checking through the door windows. Sometimes a child came and fetched one of the staff members if he or she was in need of support or wanted to show them something. Occasionally, a staff member opened a door to get a closer look at what was going on and helped out or sanctioned the pupils by reprimanding them if it was considered necessary. This reasoning and the staff’s peripheral subject position during free play is closely related to governing strategies in pre-school practice (Ailwood 2003, Holligan 1999; Tullgren 2004) and Foucault’s (1998) utilisation of the Panopticon. The staff at the Sunflower often support some of the pupils during free play, but surveillance from a distance has been built into the teaching relationship (cf. Foucault 1998).

Tracking pupils was also part of the outdoor activities. The staff occasionally participated in the pupils’ play but they mostly circulated in the schoolyard. This was part of their strategic conduct (Giddens 1984) since they could orchestrate activities from within a peripheral subject position and observe and ensure that none of the pupils were sad, left alone or doing something they were not supposed to do.

Their strategic conduct also became an object for discussion during one of the weekly planning meetings. The discussion concerned a football field located adjacent to the schoolyard. The pupils had to cross a small road to get to it and cars used the road occasionally. The discussion focused on whether a member of staff should accompany the pupils to the football field, stay with them and watch the game or if it would be possible to monitor the game from the schoolyard and, if so, which pupils should be allowed to go there? It was decided that pupils 8 years or older would be allowed to go there if a staff member was available. Otherwise, no one would be allowed to play football there. This discussion was also focused on in the walk-and-talk-conversation with Evelyn and Caroline.

Caroline: But it is also individual. It is so hard to decide an age. /.../ because I know that some would manage it fine and some wouldn’t. So that’s more of a problem /.../ than deciding an age at, at second grade, third graders are allowed to go but no...there are first
Caroline asserts that it is sometimes easy to generalise pupils’ abilities with respect to their age. The quotation above is an example of such a generalisation and this practice is grounded in a belief that classification, although somewhat challenged here, facilitates the staff’s need for control (cf. Foucault 1998). Classification based on the age of the pupils was, however, a conventional and legitimised (Giddens 1984) strategy for maintaining surveillance. For example, staff-directed activities such as swimming, playing floor-ball and gymnastics in the sports hall only included pupils of a certain age as a governing strategy used to facilitate the arranging and orchestrating of the activity.

**The locale as regionalised areas**

The Sunflower is located in a school and this means that the leisure-time centre shares its rooms, its settings for interaction, with the school during school time. After school, the centre’s activity also has access to the sports hall, the former library, the school dining hall and almost all classrooms in that part of the building. This means that school-age educare activity accesses material resources, for example, a sports hall, which was not as available prior to the cooperation with the school. However, some areas, especially the main room, were emphasised by the staff during the walk-and-talk conversations. All staff members stressed the sofas located there. Caroline and Evelyn describe how they use the sofas early in the morning, before school, when the pupils arrive at the leisure-time centre:

**Caroline:** We make it cozy with some candles. Make sure that all the children feel comfortable when they arrive in the morning. We go and greet them in the hallway when they arrive.

**Evelyn** adds:

I also believe that it is like you say, Caroline, these good conversations with the children when you sit together with them in the sofa. You start discussing different things and you bring in the local newspaper, and start to talk about what the weather is like and that you …, but there are lots of issues you discuss during this time. Before it all starts.

This statement also underlines the importance of basic care in the centre’s activity. Mornings on the sofas are seen as a cozy time when only a few of the pupils have arrived and Mary emphasises that the main room functions as the heart of the leisure-time centre.

**Mary:** This is like our control room. It sounds weird but it is just like that. Because we have, it is from this place we steer sort of how the afternoon is going to be, because it is like the centre for everything, yes … for our workplace.
The quotation underlines the importance of the main room and, at the same time, it also stresses the importance of surveillance (Rose 1996). The small desk where they store all the information about the pupils, including the list where they note who will be attending in the afternoon, is situated in this room.

Although the centre’s activity was comprised of several organised activities in secluded locales, these were hardly mentioned. One reason for not emphasising them is that the staff prioritised free play and basic needs, while activities in the more remote locales comprised staff-governed activities which were less emphasised. This also means that not all rooms and spaces were of equal importance since they were regionalised (Giddens 1984). Moreover, the staff did not have authoritative or allocative powers to influence or use resources in all locales in the same way as in the main room or the painting room. During the walk-and-talk conversations, one of the classrooms they shared with a pre-school class was discussed. Evelyn described how the pupils often played school and that being ‘teacher’ was very popular. According to Evelyn, the equipment in the pre-school classroom contributed to the pupils’ play. They used an ordinary whiteboard and the desks as material resources to construct their play. Evelyn and Caroline also declared that the room could be seen as divided into different sections which provided different play opportunities. One of the corners in the classroom had a supply of material that afforded playing restaurant since, among other things, plastic plates and plastic dishes were available. They also played shop with the help of a cash register, or played with dolls. This particular corner became an issue during one of the weekly work meetings.

The next issue was dedicated to discuss, what I use to call, the ‘doll corner’. The doll corner, situated in one of the pre-school classes, needs to be rearranged according to the pre-school teacher. She needs this corner to install one or two computers there. The teacher thought dolls were OK but computers were really needed in that corner. She had asked Caroline if it was OK to rearrange the room and Caroline initially thought it was OK but she had changed her mind. Neither Evelyn nor Mary were too happy about this potential reorganisation. ‘The rooms function as a playroom would be undermined.’ It was argued that there should be a corner for play somewhere and it seemed as if a corner for computers was not seen as an area for play compared to a doll corner. The meeting ended with the decision that someone of the staff members had to talk to the pre-school teacher and ask her to reconsider her decision or consider if it would be possible to move the playthings to another spot in the classroom (Field notes, October 2012).

The pre-school teacher was apparently given the authority to make the final decision concerning the equipment although the room was used solely by the leisure-time centre in the afternoons. The leisure-time pedagogues’ subordination to the pre-school teacher reminds of findings by Calander (1997, 1999) who studied the outcome of the collaboration between leisure-time pedagogues and primary teachers.
Conclusions

The study has discussed the following four discourses: Supporting pupils’ play and basic needs, the child-to-staff ratio as a structuring feature, surveillance as strategic conduct and the locale as regionalised areas. These discourses all contribute to producing and reproducing social practice and are intertwined and “networked together” as “a particular social ordering of relationships among different ways of making meaning” (Fairclough 2010, 265).

The most prominent discourse in the order of discourse and essential for everyday practice is supporting pupils’ play and basic needs. Pupils’ play and basic needs are positioned at the core of the staff member’s work, who use this discursive resource to define their professional identity by this fundamental value position. This implies that staff view supporting play and children’s basic needs as also supporting their development and learning. This conviction diverges from the stress of learning in the way as requested by the Swedish Schools Inspectorate (2010). It is instead based on an older leisure-time centre practice (cf. Evaldsson 1993; Ursberg 1996) which has become part of the staff’s practical and discursive consciousness and contributes to reproducing the Sunflower as a social system (cf. Giddens 1984). It also includes adopting a peripheral subject position comprised of rules which resemble approaches in pre-school and imply surveillance-from-a-distance during free play (cf. Ailwood 2003; Tullgren 2004). Another reason this discourse is seen as the most prominent discourse is that the peripheral subject position and the point of departure for the work have not changed although the number of pupils, highlighted in the child-to-staff ratio as a structuring feature discourse, is seen as obstructing the work and defining the centre’s activity. One example that demonstrates the difficulties of coordinating care and developing activities, when the centre’s activity includes many younger pupils, is the use of demanding board games. Board games are seen as pedagogical devices; however, games considered difficult to play without the help of a staff member were locked away as a strategy to orchestrate and structure the centre’s activity. This led to a situation where these games were only used on special occasions, i.e. on days when fewer pupils participate in the centre’s activity. The strategy does not facilitate the pupils’ learning concerning these pedagogical devices. Nor does it provide many opportunities for challenging the children’s abilities, something which has been asked for by the Schools Inspectorate (2010). The existing strategy was seen as a consequence of the child-to-staff ratio and was enhanced by the pupils’ misallocated age distribution.

The discourse surveillance as strategic conduct is a consequence of and deeply intertwined with the preceding discourses. Surveillance is consequently emphasised as a way to design the activities according to what the staff find important. This implies that to be able to use free play activities, which results in pupils moving between different spaces, and also maintain a basic concern for the pupils’
well-being, despite the child-to-staff ratio, surveillance is highlighted. However, this discourse also involves more active strategies where the classification and segregation of pupils based on age is evident. This practice is, according to Foucault (1998), a way of distributing pupils in the locale and, at the same time, facilitating discipline. Surveillance opportunities were enhanced by recurring attendance checks during the afternoon. This was an unwritten prescription (cf. Giddens 1984), an active and established strategy to prevent and control pupils from disappearing, moving to places where they were not supposed to be, to discover who was present and who was not and where they could be found. Finally, The locale as regionalised areas discourse emphasises opportunities and restrictions concerning the available rooms. The use of the rooms was a result of how the staff, as knowledgeable agents, organised the centre’s activity in their interaction with the pupils and the teachers. The locale and the pedagogical material available in the different rooms facilitated free play, including board games, pottering and role play which were also activities the staff prioritised. In this way, the pedagogical material and the rooms were allocative resources (cf. Giddens 1984) used to structure the centre’s activity. The locale was, however, regionalised and the staff’s authoritative and allocative powers were, for that reason, circumscribed. Teachers using classrooms during school time retained their authoritative and allocative powers concerning these rooms in the afternoons.

The staff are knowledgeable agents (Giddens 1984) and this way of orchestrating the centre’s activity is partly justified as a consequence of older traditions of how to perform the work. Some structures that form the centre’s activity, the child-to-staff ratio and the misallocated age distribution are, however, decided on at school management and municipality levels. The social practice is therefore also partly a consequence of decisions where staff opportunities to influence are confined. Staff strategies and a concentration of a lot of young pupils in need of constant support constitute, in this case, some structures which counteract the intentions in relevant steering documents. For that reason, if school-age educare is supposed to develop in line with the National Agency for Education’s (2007) directions and the Swedish Schools Inspectorate’s (2010) suggestions, there are also reasons for discussing discourses concerning school-age educare at school management and municipality levels. State governmentality involves a translation process and responsible actors, such as municipal politicians, who also have to interpret the policy documents in inherent processes (cf. Ball 1994). It is possible that they stress alternative and more powerful discourses which contribute to structuring the everyday practice in school-age educare (cf. Fairclough 2010). Therefore, it is vital that future studies concerning school-age educare also analyse how policy documents are interpreted and implemented at the municipal level. Further, there is also reason to ask why the government, which is responsible for producing the steering documents, does not seem to act upon the critical evaluations from the Swedish National Agency for Education.
and the Swedish Schools Inspectorate concerning, for example, the child-to-staff ratio.

The presented findings cannot be generalised and should be seen as characteristic features regarding the social practice at the Sunflower. The pattern of recurrent practices which form the Sunflower as a social system and the order of the discourse have been highlighted from the perspective of the staff. This means that some parts of the social and discursive practice have been discussed but not the entire practice since everyday practice is mutually constituted by staff and pupils. This underlines the need for more research concerning the production and reproduction of everyday practice in school-age educare and the involvement of the pupils' voices in this research. The activities in school-age educare also have to be considered based on both the pupils' opportunities to make decisions concerning their leisure (Haglund 2009) and other normative demands concerning their learning opportunities.

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Notes

1 The official English term for the institution has for many years been leisure-time centre. Swedish researchers and university teachers often refer to leisure-time centre activity as school-age educare as a way of emphasising that such activity comprises both education and care.

2 To be in line with the terms in governmental steering documents, this article will use the word “pupil” when referring to children in school-age educare. The term “children” is, however, used when referring to references using that word.

3 The Education Act describes education as the activity where the teaching taking place is derived from established objectives. Teaching is defined as such goal-directed processes which, under the guidance of teachers or pre-school teachers, refer to development and learning by acquiring and developing knowledge and values.

4 Leisure-time pedagogue is the official term for the group of staff with earlier training for leisure-time centres. As mentioned, the training was replaced in 2011 by current teacher training.

5 The staff never discussed the pupils as “pupils”. The pupils were discussed as “children” during the field studies and this also becomes evident in the walk-and-talk excerpts.

6 This reasoning resembles the results of Andersson (2010, 2013) who found that leisure-time pedagogues were not entirely positive concerning assessments of children in the afternoons. That kind of practice was closely associated with how assessments were performed in school and was something leisure-time pedagogues were not used to doing during afternoon activity.
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