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The schoolarization of the preschool class – policy discourses and educational restructuring in Sweden

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ABSTRACT
Our aim in this article is to examine policy discourses that promote positional changes for the preschool class in the Swedish educational system. The preschool class is currently going through a watershed period, which is characterized by uncertainty regarding its position in the education system. In this article, we explore changes in the Swedish education system by analysing policy documents from 1997 to 2017 with a specific focus on the positional shift of the preschool class. The departure point for our study is that policy relates to the concepts of subjectification, qualification and socialization. In addition, we examine how these goals in education are to be achieved and the educational restructuring required to do this. The findings show that policy discourses about the preschool class have shifted from pedagogical arguments about the benefits of pedagogical integration, consensus and the move of preschool pedagogy into school education, to more school-oriented, knowledge-economy arguments about increased goal achievement. Schoolarization describes a positional shift in the education system that contains two collaborative processes: an approach towards school content, goals and forms for teaching and a distancing to the content and goals formulated for Early Education and Care.

Introduction
In this article, we explore policy changes in the Swedish education system, with a specific focus on the reforms of the preschool class for 6-year-old children. The preschool class was established as a school form in 1998 with the specific focus of providing a bridge between preschool and compulsory school. The purpose of the preschool class is to relate to the surrounding institutions – preschool and school – in order to ‘smooth’ children’s transition from one to the other. An overarching goal is to create continuity in early education (Ackesjö, 2014; Ackesjö & Persson, 2016; Lago, 2014). The preschool class may be regarded as a ‘borderland practice’ (Ackesjö, 2010), operating in an area that cannot be characterized as either school or preschool. Instead, the preschool class has been constructed as an arena located on the border, or in between two school forms, each of which has clear traditions of its own.

However, the preschool class is currently going through a watershed period, characterized by uncertainty regarding its position in the education system. The current national curriculum for compulsory school, now includes a new section for the preschool class with the aim of clarifying the objectives of the preschool class and the core skills that children are supposed to develop. In addition to this, the preschool class was made compulsory for all 6-year-old children in 2018. As a consequence, the compulsory schooling in Sweden is now 10 years. These changes create new conditions for children, teachers and teaching in the preschool class.

This article is one part of a research project called The preschool class in transition. The overall aim of the project is to generate knowledge about the policy changes that are involved and the consequences of these positional shifts in the Swedish educational landscape. The policy intentions with the preschool class are related to global and national context and traditions. Our aim in this article is to examine the content of policy discourses that promote positional changes for the preschool class in the Swedish educational system, and the educational restructuring policy discourses that promote these positional changes. In doing so, we discuss the assumptions and reasons that support the ongoing processes of educational policy change and restructuring processes characterized as schoolarization.

When national context encounters global policy
The stated purpose of the Swedish preschool class is to integrate two different traditions: a social- and pedagogical early education tradition and an academic school tradition. (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD] 2006, 2012;
Bennett, 2005). The social-pedagogical tradition has a focus on developing children’s social competence, play and interaction, combines education and caring (Edu-Care) and has a holistic view of the child’s development. The academic tradition highlights children’s qualification for primary school as the main task of early education. The academic tradition promotes knowledge-oriented activities focused on academic skills that the children should achieve. This tradition has challenged the Nordic model of social pedagogy (Einarsdottir, Purola, Johansson, Broström, & Emilson, 2015; Vallberg Roth, 2013).

According to Ackesjö and Persson (2016), preschool class teachers construct an educational position for the preschool class that is influenced by the two traditions described above, but with a more powerful orientation towards an academic position. The teachers have a school-oriented focus on subject-related knowledge that relate to a more academic and school preparatory positioning of the preschool class. This orientation can be explained partly as a result of ongoing changes in Swedish education policy. Sweden has a relatively long history of comprehensive education for equality and democracy (Sundberg & Wahlström, 2012). However, in recent times Swedish education policy has changed from the ideological and political standpoints of education for citizenship to more one-way discussions about goal attainment and results for the individual student (Segerholm, 2009).

OECD is one of the major global policy influencers promoting policy change through their reviews and recommendations. OECD’s influence over education policy stems from the collection, classification and processing, analysing and storing policy information from the 35 member states. Even if the OECD does not make legally binding decisions or obligatory policy recommendations, it has developed an advisory role to policymakers at the highest level and thereby exerted a widespread influence on its member states in various ways.

The OECD operates through disseminating what works in policy terms – and in particular what has proven to be successful in relation to international competition. The most powerful policy instrument has been the PISA-program in which over 80 countries have been participating since the introduction in 2003 (Ball, 2017). Pettersson (2014) states that international large-scale assessments serve as projection screens to argue for reform or the maintenance of the status quo. There has been a shift from curriculum towards evaluation in the OECD reviews on how to improve quality in the Swedish and Norwegian early education and this is further strengthened by a global reasoning on education. However, the implementation of policy is not one-directional. There is a clear influence from the Nordic countries on OECD-policy for the integration of early education and care (Edu-Care) (OECD, 2006; Sjöstrand Öhrfeldt, 2019).

Policy discourses and educational restructuring

During the last 20 years, education has become subject to policy overload. This is often referred to as ‘travelling policies’ of education. Policy ideas change as they move around the world and are reassembled in different ways, in particular places and for various reasons (Ball, 2017). Global and local policy logics are intertwined and entangled to such an extent that it can be difficult to determine where the developments begin or end (Pettersson, Prøitz, & Forsberg, 2017). It seems reasonable to suggest that if international policies influence national education policies through reception, translation and lending, then national policies will also have an impact on international education policy (Prøitz, 2015). As a result, there will be compromises in balancing global policy with national interests, and national historical and contextual traditions to global interests.

Policy is reproduced and reworked over time through reports, reviews and investigations, speeches and agendas. This implies that policy cannot be treated as a simple object, a product or an outcome – rather it is a process. Part of the policy work is done through texts (spoken or written) which have a semantic and ontological force as language produces certain meanings and social positions. Policy discourses mobilize truth claims and constitute rather than reflect social reality. They play a part in constructing meaning, identifying problems, causes and effects in education over time (Ball, 2017).

To adjust to global educational policy, a national restructuring of education as a whole is needed (Lindblad & Popkewitz, 2004). This is done through processes such as decentralization, deregulation, professional accountability and marketization (Nordin, 2012; Wahlström & Sundberg, 2015). There is a constant flow of recontextualizations that interweave global with local, a flow with multiple actors, geographies and translations involved (Larner & Laurie, 2010). This is the core of what Sahlberg calls GERM; the Global Education Reform Movement (Sahlberg, 2016). GERM rests, according to Sahlberg on a set of common policy technologies and is promoted through interests of the international development agencies through their interventions in national education reforms and the dissemination of good practice. It is driven by a process of global convergence and can be described as a paradigm for public management that has a close focus on results in terms of efficiency and quality. In short, it is a mode for
state control and steering from a distance (Ball, 2017).

This argument implies that states have changed their focus on governing to a more evaluation-based discourse of governance with a greater emphasis on assessment, monitoring and inspection (Pettersson et al., 2017). A strengthened national control system including inspections, an increased number of tests and new grading systems are all part of this process (Nordin, 2012). A restructuring rationale based on recentralization, management, quality and evaluation is according to Pettersson (2014) and Lindblad and Popkewitz (2004) now more evident. Educational restructuring processes are part of the truth claims and policy goals. Educational restructuring is in this meaning discourses about how truth claims and policy goals should be managed, administrated and organized. These changes in governance have created a new educational landscape and resulted in new questions for educational researchers to address and investigate (Pettersson et al., 2017).

Theory and theoretical concepts of analysis

From a discourse perspective, the writing of policy is a production of meaning and truth. Foucault (1980) defined truth as a ‘system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements’ (p. 133). Such an approach emphasizes the ways in which language, and more broadly discourse, sets limits upon what can be said (Foucault, 1971). Foucault situates truth (and claims of truth) within particular discourses and time periods. Truths are dependent on institutional and rhetorical practices in existence at a certain time. Stone (2002) explains that policy writing is a process of persuasion, a search for criteria and a way of justifying choices and statements. Meanings in policy are set within a moving discursive frame which articulates and constrains the possibilities and probabilities of the identified circumstances. Policy documents make claims about the problems to be solved and, on a structural level, how to solve them.

The claims of truth in educational policy texts and documents operate in a moving discourse frame and formulate the meaning of what ‘good education’ means in a particular time period. As Lindblad and Popkewitz (2004) write, policies are narratives about progress and salvation. Educational achievements become tales about ‘finding the better life’ (p. 71), about ‘making’ the new citizen through schooling.

The point of departure in our study is that educational policy change is promoted by (implicit or explicit) claims about the child, the education system and the society. In order to analyse policy discourses that promote positional changes for the preschool class, we use Biesta’s (2009) notion of ‘good education’, underpinned by the concepts of subjectification, qualification and socialization. Firstly, policy is making discourse claims about the subject, that is the child/pupil to be educated. Secondly, to promote educational change, policy makes claims about the education system, particularly related to what the child is supposed to be qualified for in the education system. Thirdly, as education policy is part of a defined (past, current and future) society, there will be claims about society and socialization in policy documents. This is further explained in the following discussion.

According to Biesta (2009), education impacts on processes of subjectification – discourses of becoming a subject. This implies that there will be claims about the nature of the subject – the child – in policy documents. Here, we are concerned with the policy claims about the nature of the 6-year-old child (the being child) and the desirable child (the becoming child) in the preschool class. In the process of analysing policy documents for the preschool class, we raise the question: what claims are made about the six-year-old child in preschool class?

The qualification discourse of education lies in the meaning of providing children with the knowledge, skills and understandings that will allow them to cope with future education. Policy claims about educational qualification relates to something that is not yet present, something that children have to be prepared to handle. In the process of analysing policy documents for the preschool class, we raise the question: what claims are made about how the preschool class should qualify the children for primary school?

The socialization discourse has to do with descriptions of how children should become members and part of the society. Policy says something about the society that children should adapt to. In policy, education inserts children into existing ways of doing and being and plays an important role in the continuation of a society’s culture and tradition. In the process of analysing policy documents for the preschool class, we raise the question: what claims are made about the society that children are supposed to be socialised to?

In addition to these concepts, we also explore the educational restructuring policy discourses that promote the positional change of the preschool class. Policy discourses on subjectification, qualification and socialization are related to the educational restructuring that policymakers find necessary to reach new educational goals. Educational restructuring is then about what changes in the educational system, the organization and management of the schools are required to promote ‘good education’. In the process of analysing policy documents for the preschool class, we raise the question: what claims are made about the restructuring of the preschool class?
Methodology

Our point of departure is that policy claims about ‘good education’ – the subject, the qualification and the society – relate to the preschool class to cultural, social and economic patterns (Biesta, 2009). They are claims of truth about reality (such as ‘we are living in the knowledge society’). The function of such claims is to legitimize changes in curriculum and to place them in a national and global context (Lindblad & Popkewitz, 2004). In policy documents, we will find claims about desirable outcomes as well as taken-for-granted assumptions concerning the child, the society and the function of education.

To address our aim, we analyse the policy documents that have preceeded educational changes in the preschool class. The analysed documents span over 20 years – prior to the introduction of preschool class in 1997 up until 2017. The selection of documents is based on the sampling important political cases (Patton, 1980). All main governmental texts concerning the preschool class for two decades are included in our analysis: political investigations, government proposals, legislation proposals, assignments from the government to the National Agency of Education and memorandums. The analysed documents are presented in Appendix 1.

Discourse analysis emphasizes the construction of meaning in policy documents. It requires careful reading and interpretation of textual material in order to identify patterns and broad areas contained within the discourse (Coyle, 1995; Potter & Wetherall, 1987). By seeking the degree of variability in the discourse, it is possible to rule out rival interpretations (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2005).

Inspired by Lindseth & Norberg’s (2004) model, the analysis process included three steps: empirical close reading; de-construction; and reconstruction (see Table 1).

Empirical close reading: Initially, all selected policy documents were read in full several times. Sections of texts concerning the preschool class, and changes thereof, were selected for further analysis.

De-construction of text: The selected text was then deconstructed into meaning units and key-words. The identified keywords were selected as they condensed the policy texts original intentions and meanings.

Re-construction: The keywords identified were synthesized into claims in order to answer the questions raised in relation to the theoretical concepts: subjectification, qualification, socialization and educational restructuring. The claims are re-constructed from the keywords and not quoted literally from the policy documents. They are formulated as a way to make meaning of a larger context. Finally, the claims were sorted into tables illustrating policy changes over the time period. The analysis process is illustrated in Table 1.

Results

The analysis we present in this section captures the policy claims and the changes during the time period analysed through the theoretical concepts described above. Note that the theoretical concepts cannot be easily separated. Rather, they are overlapping and thus illustrating a moving policy discourse over time.

Subjectification

We begin by reporting how the child is described in the policy documents (Table 2): What claims are made about the six-year-old child in preschool class?

When the preschool class was introduced in 1997, the 6 year-old was characterized as a playful and exploring child. Play is the gateway to the child’s orientation in existence and ‘stays so for many years’ (SOU 1997: 21, p.84). The universal child was described as playful and eager to explore. Based on this, the child was expected to benefit from a preschool class that was process-oriented rather than product- and result-oriented. The discourse in this document argued that each child’s social development skills should be supported and that children had the right to rest and relaxation. There was an emphasis on the child as being rather than what the child should become. In the following policy documents, assumptions about the universal child remained but was accompanied by emphasis on differences and the individual child’s characteristics. This is reflected in the comment that ‘School should be adapted to the children’ (SOU 2010: 67, p. 12) and not the other way around.

In the ESO-report (ESO 2012:2) there is a departure from descriptions of the essential child. Instead, the emphasis is on the conditions children experience during their upbringing. Children with different prerequisites and capabilities are described in the text, and there is particular emphasis on children in need of special education interventions.

Starting from the 2015 investigation (SOU 2015:91) there are changes in the claims about what

| Theoretical Concept | Empirical close reading, excerpts | De-construction, keywords | Re-construction, claims |
|----------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| Subjectification     | Play is the gateway to the child’s orientation to the world. Play and creativity is an essential part in the active learning and pupil’s lust and curiosity shall be taken advantage of. | Playful, Creative, Active, Exploring, Learning | A playing and exploring child |

Table 1. An example of the analysis process.

| Concept | Theoretical Concept | Empirical close reading, excerpts | De-construction, keywords | Re-construction, claims |
|---------|---------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| Subjectification | Play is the gateway to the child’s orientation to the world. Play and creativity is an essential part in the active learning and pupil’s lust and curiosity shall be taken advantage of. | Playful, Creative, Active, Exploring, Learning | A playing and exploring child |

| Concept | Theoretical Concept | Empirical close reading, excerpts | De-construction, keywords | Re-construction, claims |
|---------|---------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| Subjectification | Play is the gateway to the child’s orientation to the world. Play and creativity is an essential part in the active learning and pupil’s lust and curiosity shall be taken advantage of. | Playful, Creative, Active, Exploring, Learning | A playing and exploring child |
a child is and what he or she will become. The term 'child' is replaced by the term 'pupil'. The performing school pupil appears in the text; pupils’ linguistic awareness and mathematical thinking are now to be assessed (SOU 2016:59). In contrast to what was formulated in 1997, the differences in children’s abilities are now something that the school should not adapt to. Instead, the child should be adapted and shaped to fit into national set criteria.

Investigations at the end of the time period (SOU 2015:91; SOU 2017:35; prop. 2017/18:9) highlight the UNCRC’s articles on children’s right to education. The global child and children’s right to education are in focus: ‘Mandatory school attendance corresponds to the right of education’ (SOU 2015:91, p. 77). There is an emphasis on the best interests of children and the rights that all children have to an equivalent education. Respect for the national values of the country of residence and the country of origin, and for cultures that differ from the child’s own, are taken as important ethical foundations. The child has potential and possibilities with the right to develop these in the preschool class.

**Qualification**

In this section, we present how children are supposed to be qualified according to the policy documents (Table 3): What claims are made about how the preschool class should qualify the children for primary school?

The early documents (SOU 1997:21; prop. 1997/98.6) describe repeatedly that teaching should be adapted to children’s different levels of knowledge and prerequisites. ‘School shall be a place where learning should be considered as a process and not as a product’ (SOU 1997:21, p.84), and in the teaching, play and care should be important contributing parts. Further, individually adapted teaching should be used to qualify the child for continued schooling. Traditions from preschool, the preschool class, leisure-time centres and school should be integrated (SOU 1997:21; SOU 2010:67). Play, creativity and care were considered to be important elements of learning. The preschool class (as well as compulsory school) were supposed to take the children’s own abilities, interests and knowledge into account in order to stimulate each child’s development and learning, as well as lay the foundation for continued schooling (SKOLFS 2010:800). The effort to qualify the child for continued schooling should be individually based: ‘The child prerequisites and development, instead of biological age, shall direct the content and form of teaching’ (Prop 1997/98:6, p.42). However, documents also refer to ambiguity in the instructional content and organization of the preschool class (SOU 2010:67).
Starting from 2012, we detect policy discussions about the need for a clearer knowledge focus and increased knowledge requirements. From now, it is noted that ‘the preschool class teaching should contribute to pupils obtaining compulsory primary school goals’ (ESO 2012:2, p. 114). In addition, it was proposed that children’s knowledge should be assessed and reviewed early in both preschool and school (ESO 2012:2). One interpretation of this statement is that policymakers were being affected by the results from the PISA assessments, showing that Sweden as a nation had fallen in the PISA ranking. If so, the PISA results were influencing the national discussion about the purpose of the preschool class, emphasizing the task of qualifying pupils for school. One document stated that the content and assignment of the preschool class needed to be clarified in order to create conditions for national equivalence (U2015/191/s).

The later documents established that the preschool class was supposed to qualify the children for the upcoming school’s knowledge requirements: ‘When all six year olds are present in the mandatory preschool class, the assignment to prepare for year one in primary school becomes clearer’ (SOU 2015:91; p. 12). A new section was introduced in the primary school curriculum in order to clarify the teaching assignment in the preschool class and make this level of education more nationally equivalent (U2015/191/s). The content in the curriculum focused on knowledge areas closely related to primary school curriculum. Mandatory assessment of the pupils’ knowledge was again suggested, together with a national guarantee for early intervention. This assessment was to be based on a national template (SOU 2016:59). Early detection and interventions were related to creating increased goal achievement (SOU 2017:35).

**Socialization**

In this section, we present descriptions of the society in policy documents (Table 4): What claims are made about the society that children are supposed to be socialised to?

| Qualification | Qualify children by individually-adapted teaching. | Qualify children by a nationally equivalent educational content with a clearer focus on knowledge and increased knowledge requirements. | Qualify children by mandatory assessments of pupils’ knowledge to increase goal achievement. |
|---------------|--------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| SOU 1997:21   | ESO 2012:2                                       | SOU 2015:91                                                      | SOU 2017:35                                                      |
| prop. 1997/98:6 | U2015/191/s                                      | SOU 2016:59                                                      | Prop 2017/18:9                                                   |

At the beginning of the time period studied, Sweden was described as a multicultural society in policy documents and one assignment of the preschool class was to contribute to ‘children learning respect and tolerance, regardless of cultural, ethnic or religious affiliation’ (SOU 1997:21, p. 84). The concept of fostering is emphasized as well as human values, care and well-being.

In the proposal for the flexible school start (SOU 2010:67) parents’ choices in a market-oriented society are prominent. This document proposed that parents could choose at which age their children started school (6, 7, or 8 years old), depending on their judgements about their children’s school readiness.

The ESO report (ESO 2012:2) describes a society with social gaps that provides different conditions for children to succeed in school and in future work life. The report states that society has a responsibility to create good conditions for all children’s development and learning and where pupils feel well and are ready to meet the adult world and future work life. It is established that children are born with different prerequisites and grow up under ‘so many different circumstances’ and ‘exposed environments’ (ibid, p.107) that it is necessary to focus the society’s distribution of resources to the children in need of special support, so that they do not fail in school.

Starting from 2015, reference to the global knowledge society emerged in the policy documents (SOU 2015:191; SOU 2016:59). There are clear references to international knowledge assessments (TIMSS, PISA, PIRLS) that motivate the investment of reforms to increase the knowledge level. References to international assessments also proposed changes in the preschool class which, in turn, were linked to equivalence. The investigation SOU 2017:35 reinforces the descriptions of the global knowledge society and of a society that does not provide equivalent conditions: ‘All pupils shall … be given knowledge enough to manage future education and work life’ (SOU 2015:91, p.338). This document suggests that society had changed in far-reaching ways during
recent decades as a consequence of globalization, digitalization and demographic changes. Lifelong learning and the shaping of a knowledge society have now become keywords in the socialization process.

**Educational restructuring**

In this last section, we describe the educational restructuring that policymakers find necessary to reach new educational goals (Table 5): *What claims are made about the restructuring of the preschool class?*

The preschool class was established as a school form in 1998, intending to be a bridge between preschool and compulsory school. Ideas of reorganizing the whole school were presented in terms of enabling integration of the activities in the preschool class, leisure-time centre and school. In terms of governance, preschool, the preschool class and leisure-time centres were moved from the department of social services to the department of education. A new curriculum for preschool and primary school (including the preschool class and leisure-time centre) was implemented: ‘The meeting between traditions is supposed to release pedagogical power of development to renew the pedagogical arenas’ (Prop 1997/98:6, p. 42). The narrative was clear: through the preschool class, preschool pedagogy would influence the education in primary school (SOU 1997:21; prop. 1997/98:6). The combination of the preschool and the school pedagogy would give the preschool class its identity. The concept of teaching was re-formulated (SKOLFS 2010:800) as the school and its terminology were to be adapted to the youngest children in school; the 6-year olds in the preschool class.

Later, the flexible school start age is promoted and tested. School maturity assessments prior to the transition to preschool class were motivated in order to organize the continuing teaching individually (SOU 2010:67). Reforms about lowering the school start age and making the preschool class mandatory were recurring on the policy agenda (SOU 2010:67; ESO 2012:2). The combination of the preschool and the school pedagogy would give the preschool class its identity. The concept of teaching was re-formulated (SKOLFS 2010:800) as the school and its terminology were to be adapted to the youngest children in school; the 6-year olds in the preschool class.

The primary school investigation (SOU 2015:91) received the directive to examine the consequences of the preschool class becoming compulsory. The main reasons for the move to make the preschool class compulsory relate to increased equivalence in education by giving all children the same opportunities to learn. The basis for these major changes were laid during this period, based on the argument summarized in the document title: ‘more time for knowledge’. Lowering the school start age was regarded as providing the pupils with one more year to reach the school knowledge requirements (SOU 2015:91; prop. 2017/18:9). ‘The time spent on education is an important factor for the pupils’ development of knowledge’ (SOU 2017:35, p. 246). A new section for the preschool class was introduced in the primary school curriculum, with the argument that this better prepared children for primary school (U2015/191/s).

At the end of the time period, there is a growing discussion about the lack of equivalence in the school system, the consequences of the free school choice and the correlations between family background and pupils’ school results. School attendance and a mandatory preschool class with education focusing on school’s knowledge requirements are suggested to aid increased equivalency, as well as continuity and progression in the teaching (SOU 2015:91). By the end of the time period, the decision is made to lower the school start age and to make the preschool class compulsory for all 6 year-olds (SOU 2017:35; Prop. 2017/18:9).

**Discussion**

Our aim in this article is to examine the policy discourses that promote positional changes for the preschool class in the Swedish educational system, and the educational restructuring policy discourses that promote these positional changes. We view the analysed documents as policy narratives, as policy writing is a process of persuasion, a search for criteria and a way of justifying choices and statements. The keywords and claims are discourses formulated to promote stability or change in the educational system. The point of departure for our study is that policy claims about education are related to what Biesta (2009) refers to as subjectification,

| Table 5. Educational restructuring. |
|------------------------------------|
| SOU 1997:21                      |
| Prop. 1997/98:6                  |
| SKOLFS 2010:800                  |
| SOU 2010:67                      |
| ESO 2012:2                       |
| SOU 2015:91                      |
| SOU 2016:59                      |
| + 2017:35                       |
| Prop. 2017/18:9                  |
| Educational restructuring        |
| Voluntary preschool class is established. Restructuring school by a new combined curriculum. |
| School maturity assessment, lowering school start age and flexible school start is promoted and tested. |
| Mandatory preschool class is investigated. New curriculum section is introduced. |
| Ten-year compulsory school, including mandatory preschool class and school attendance, is decided. |
qualification and socialization, and the need for educational restructuring.

In terms of *subjectification*, there is a shift in policy discourses about the child: from a playful/exploratory child to a performing and measurable global school pupil and finally the global world citizen with the right to equivalent education.

In terms of *qualification*, there is a shift in policy discourses about what is required to qualify the child to further education: from individually adapted teaching, to qualifying children by a nationally equivalent educational content and finally to qualifying children by mandatory assessments.

In terms of *socialization*, there is a shift in policy discourses about the society: from descriptions of a multicultural society, followed by a society which provides unequal conditions – and constructs social gaps – and finally descriptions of a society characterized by globalization, knowledge, digitalization and demographic changes.

In terms of *restructuring*, we initially find discourses promoting a new school form – the preschool class – with the ambition that the school should adapt to the youngest children in preschool class. The discourse then shifted to promoting that the preschool class should adapt to the school culture and organization. At the end of the time period investigated, the school system is preparing to become a 10 years of compulsory school including a compulsory preschool class. Table 6 summarizes our findings from the policy documents.

While these points are represented separately in Table 6, it is important to point out that the borders between the claims can be overlapping. For example, qualification through increased knowledge assessments can also be interpreted as a way to restructure and control education according to the new policies that are to be implemented. Another example is the subject for education; the child as a global, worldly citizen also involves the exploring child, although this subject for education in the preschool class is not in the foreground. Since the claims are fluent and overlapping, but still coherent, they can provide a basis for discussing the overall picture of an ongoing shift in the position of the preschool class in the education system.

**The schoolarization of the preschool class**

From our analysis, we can see is a position shift in the policy discourses concerning the Swedish preschool class over the past two decades. Earlier policy narratives about pedagogical integration and the introduction of the preschool pedagogy into school education have been replaced by more school-oriented, knowledge-economy arguments that emphasize increased goal achievement. When the Swedish national results in PISA and other international knowledge assessments fell during the time period investigated, focus in the educational policy arguments shifted towards a knowledge rationality and formally controlled teaching, knowledge effectiveness and goal achievement. The earlier influence from the Nordic countries, based on the intertwining of Early Childhood Education and Care, was transformed in policy discourses where assessment and goal-orientation were moved to the foreground. A global society was described; actually a globalization of goals and organization of education based on Swedish pupils being a part of a globally competitive knowledge society that stresses assessment of pupil knowledge.

From this, the mandatory preschool class became part of the ambitions of raising the primary school knowledge results in global competitions, with the consequence that the preschool class was positioned to adapt to the culture and organization of school. We characterize this development as a process of schoolarization with a clear connection to what Sahlberg (2016) defines as GERM; a paradigm that is characterized by a focus on results, efficiency and quality.

The schoolarization process of the preschool class can be explained as a part of current global trends. There are several reasons to invest in education for young children; reasons related to the economic and financial investment paradigm that emphasizes the profitability of investments in ECEC. It is widely held that young children’s experiences of participating in early learning environments of high quality, and accessing early interventions, influence their chances in life (Heckman, 2000). Early interventions have been assumed to reduce gaps among children from families with low educational aspirations and/or low socio-economic status (Burger, 2010). A number of political initiatives taken in relation to the preschool class have aimed to improve student achievement. This puts a process of schoolarization in motion – which may contest the most fundamental principles of ECEC. As Broström (2017) notes, ECEC

| Year | Playing and Exploring Child | Performing and Measurable School Pupil | Child as a Global, Worldly Citizen |
|------|-----------------------------|----------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1997 |                             | A Society Providing Unequal Conditions | Qualification Based on Knowledge Goals |
| 2017 | Restructuring School Class by Adapting it to School | Restructuring Preschool Class by a New Voluntary Preschool Class | Qualification Based on Mandatory Knowledge Assessments |

*Table 6. Presenting the claims that promote positional changes for the preschool class in the Swedish educational system.*
in the Nordic countries has often been described as the antithesis to school education. Our results show that the process of schoolarization on one hand tends to narrow the aim of the preschool class to a focus on isolated learning outcomes for children. However, on the other hand, it may create a sense of wholeness in the educational system as the preschool class moves closer to, and becomes a clear part of, primary school. Some researchers (for example, Ring & O’Sullivan, 2018) call the global trend of preparing children for school by prescribed curriculum and a focus on academic skills ‘an epidemic’.

The concept of schoolarization is complementary to the concept of schoolification. While other researchers (e.g. Moss, 2013) have detected schoolification processes in ECEC at a classroom level, we suggest that schoolarization can be used as a concept to describe the positional shift at a policy level. Schoolarization describes the motion of a positional shift in the educational system as a whole, while schoolification describes the teaching in the ECEC classroom. Even if global and national policy brings focus on desired learning outcomes, there is no linear relation between policy and teaching in the classroom. This is also in line with Ball’s (2017) notion that policy is interpreted and re-interpreted in many ways and in many contexts.

The concept of schoolarization frames the processes of subjectification, qualification and socialization, and describes a positional shift in the education system that contains two collaborative processes: an approach towards school content, goals and forms for teaching and a distancing to the content and goals formulated for ECEC. The results also illustrate how the global and the national logics are entangled and re-assembled in different ways for various reasons (Ball, 2017). The analysed policy texts operate in a moving discourse that places different meanings in focus during different time periods. At the policy level, the preschool class approaches the school culture and organization for creating a continuity in the whole education system. The introduction of the mandatory preschool class makes up a significant milestone in this process of schoolarization.

Note

1. The preschool class in transition. Consequences of positional shifts in a reformed educational landscape. Founded by the Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet Ackesjö, dnr. 2017-03592) during 2018–2021.

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### Appendix 1

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- On good grounds – a guarantee for reading, writing and mathematics. Government public investigations, SOU 2016:59. [På goda grunder – en åtgärdsgaranti för läsning, skrivning och matematik, SOU 2016:59]
- Gathering for school. National goals and areas of development for knowledge and equivalence. Government public investigations, SOU 2016:38. [Samling för skolan – nationella målsättningar och utvecklingsområden för kunskap och likvärdighet, SOU 2016:38]
- Gathering for school. National strategy for knowledge and equivalence. Government public investigations, SOU 2017:35. [Samling för skolan. Nationell strategi för kunskap och likvärdighet, SOU 2017:35]
- School start at age six. Government bill, 2017/18:9. [Skolstart vid sex års ålder, Regeringens proposition 2017/18:9]