Teaching in preschool: heads of preschools governance throughout the systematic quality work

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**ABSTRACT**

The aim of this study was to investigate how the heads of preschool govern teaching in practice through systematic quality work. In the new Swedish Education Act, which came into force on 1 July 2011, the mission of preschools changed because teaching was introduced as a new concept, and preschool teachers were now responsible for teaching. Swedish National Agency for Inspection report that there is a lack of how the concept of teaching is used in preschools. Heads of preschool are crucial for implementing teaching, and a valuable tool for their governing is the systematic quality work which they also are responsible for. This study collected data comprising 120 systematic quality reports from preschools in Sweden, and by text analysis, we explored how the heads of preschool used the concept of teaching. The results showed an absence of governance and management among the heads of preschool concerning teaching and when teaching is used, it was mainly according to the development of all staff competencies and to the concept of variation in teaching. This indicates that the heads of preschool govern the practice in a way that made preschool teachers responsible for teaching invisible.

**Introduction**

In Sweden, until 6 years ago, teaching as a concept was not used in steering document for preschool. In the new Swedish Education Act, which came into force on 1 July 2011, preschool became a school form in its own right within the overall educational system. The mission of preschools changed because teaching was introduced as a new concept, and preschool teachers were now responsible for teaching (SFS, 2010:800). When the Swedish preschool curriculum was revised in 2010, also coming into force on 1 July 2011, the concept of teaching was not mentioned, even though it was used in the preparatory work for the curriculum (Utbildningsdepartementet, 2010) and was used in the Swedish Education Act (SFS, 2010, 800). Rather, the revised curriculum clarified that preschool teachers were responsible for implementing activities to stimulate and challenge children’s development and learning, and it further clarified goals to strive for in language, mathematics, science and technology (The Swedish National Agency for Education, 2016a). The heads of preschools have the main responsibility for that preschool practice follow both the Education Act and the curriculum. The inclusion or exclusion of the concept of teaching in educational policy and practices in preschools is a complex issue for heads of preschools; this was made clear in the Swedish National Agency for Inspection (2016) report. The report indicated that there is a lack of how the concept of teaching is used in preschools and that the children’s learning rarely happens thorough conscious teaching. This means that it is not ensured that children’s developing and learning go towards the goals the preschool school should strive for.

This trend is alarming, and the question of why there is a lack of teaching as a concept should be explored. Prior research has shown that the heads of preschools have a large responsibility when it comes to governing by initiating the clarified responsibility preschool teacher has for teaching to strengthen children’s development and learning (Eriksson, Beach, & Svensson, 2015). Thus, a prerequisite for preschool teacher to pursue with teaching is that the heads of preschools enable teaching in practice. It is their overbridged responsibility that preschools pursue the goals in the curriculum and that staff continuously develop their competencies that are needed to enable them in a professional way carry out their assignments (The Swedish National Agency for Education, 2016a). The heads of preschools are crucial for implementing teaching as the Swedish Education Act stipulates. A valuable tool for governing is termed as systematic quality work (Jarl, Kjellgren, & Quennerstedt, 2007), which functions
as a control to secure the quality of the preschool practice (e.g., Nihlfors, 2003). Systematic quality work is important for the implementation process of teaching (Nihlfors, 2003). However, few studies have investigated how the heads of preschools govern teaching in practice through systematic quality work, which is the aim of the current article. More specifically, we will investigate how the head of preschools governance teaching in the preschool practice throughout the systematic quality work. Investigating this will contribute new insights regarding where efforts should be made on how to develop preschool practice to strengthen preschool teacher’s mission to teach in preschool.

**Teaching in preschool**

Preschool in Sweden is the first stage in the educational system which are governed by its own national curriculum stating societal and educational intention for preschool children and development (The Swedish National Agency for Education, 2016a) and the Educational Act (SFS, 2010:800). About 84% of all Swedish children between ages 1 and 5 are enrolled in preschool activities (The Swedish National Agency for Education, 2016b).

Teaching as a concept has been a topic for discussion in preschool didactics, and it is largely characterized by care, learning and play (Doverborg, Pramling, & Pramling Samuelsson, 2013). This discussion has been brought to the forefront with the recent change in the Swedish Education Act (SFS, 2010: 800); in the act, preschool became its own type of school form. Teaching is defined as, ‘goal-oriented processes under supervision of a teacher or preschool teacher, which aims for development and learning by obtaining and developing knowledge and values’ (Educational Act, 2010:800, §3, translated). As prior research has shown, teaching in preschool is a complex and controversial concept, within the preschool politics, policy making, research and preschool practice (Berthelsen, et al. 2002; Hedefalk, Almqvist, & Östman, 2015; Katz, 1999; Sofou & Tsafos, 2009; Wang, Elicker, McMullen, & Mao, 2008). Prior research has emphasized that staff in preschool position themselves against the school’s perception of knowledge by describing and arguing for the preschool perception of knowledge as being distinctly different. Here, care and education constitute a whole, which contrasts with the image of school’s distinction between education and care (Enö, 2005). This maintains preschool’s long tradition of a practice built on play, learning and care in an integrated wholeness characterized by a clear focus to develop children’s social skills (Jonsson, Williams & Pramling Samuelsson, 2017).

Another strong tradition in Swedish preschools is that the responsibilities for children’s learning and development have been equally between preschool teachers and caregivers. This emphasizes the strong position of working team that consists of the two different occupational categories: preschool teachers and caregivers. This working team has a strong tradition of being a care-oriented, democratic and equal-related organization that shows the flat organization structure commonly found in preschools (Rubinstein Reich, Tallberg Broman, & Vallberg Roth, 2017). With the revised curriculum and the new Swedish Education Act, the division of labour and responsibilities was clarified between the work team, the preschool teacher and the head of the preschool. The preschool teacher will lead the teaching and the goal-oriented processes so that the curriculum’s goal and intentions could be fulfilled, that is, preschool teachers will be responsible for the educational content. Preschool teachers are also responsible for the goal-oriented work that perpetuates the development and learning of each child (The Swedish National Agency for Education, 2016a). How this clarified responsibility for preschool teachers is interpreted and is expressed in the preschools’ educational practice varies (Eriksson, 2014). Prior research has emphasized that there is a sensitiveness when discussing changes in responsibility and division of labour from when the leadership has roots in democratic style compared to the knowledge- and profession-oriented styles (Eriksson, 2014). The revised curriculum and the Swedish Education Act has led to a change in the organization from a flat structure, where the working team together was responsible for and pursued the educational practice, to a more hierarchical structure, where the preschool teacher’s responsibility is superior caregivers. This implies that the organization must enable change for preschool teacher’s mission and their leadership must be strengthened (Rubinstein Reich et al., 2017). The Swedish National Agency for Inspection (2016) shows that the heads of preschools do not arrange or enable prerequisites for preschool teachers to take responsibility for teaching based on curriculum guidelines. This is mainly because of the lack of clarity in the definition in how preschool teachers’ responsibilities for teaching shall be concretized.

The Swedish National Agency for Inspection also pinpointed an ambiguity among both work team and heads of preschools regarding what teaching means and how it is going to be pursued. The heads of preschool, preschool teachers and work teams see teaching and learning as equal concepts; preschool teachers do not see themselves as teaching teachers. Therefore, the children in preschools risk losing a number of opportunities they could have if taught with a strict curriculum. Furthermore, the report
shows that there is ambiguity regarding the preschool teachers’ pronounced responsibilities for teaching and the educational assignments. The heads of preschools, preschool teachers and work teams give an unclear picture, and it varies as to how the heads of preschool govern and create opportunities for preschool teachers to take their responsibility for teaching.

**Systematic quality work**

Number of studies have shown that quality of preschool plays a major function in moderating the effect of it attendance on child outcomes (Anders et al., 2012, 2013; Belsky et al., 2007; Burshinal et al., 2009; Vandell et al., 2010). In Sweden as well as in Norway, it is an increased control from the state regarding the quality of preschool (National Agency for Education, 2016a; Nygärd, 2017; Taguma et al., 2013). Quality in relation to children’s learning is in focus (Nygärd, 2015). In Sweden, the practice should be organized in order to challenge and stimulate children development, and learning and the Education Act stipulate that this shall pursue throughout teaching. The systematic quality work in preschool is directed towards how the practice creates conditions for children’s learning and development. Thus, the practice is evaluated in the systematic quality work, where organization of teaching is important for children’s learning and development.

Teaching is pursued according to the goal in the curriculum and is evaluated through systematic quality work. The evaluation is related to the goal to strive towards the preschool curriculum and is a question of how well the preschool works towards these objectives (The Swedish National Agency for Education, 2017). The purpose of systematic quality work is to gain knowledge about the preschool organization, content, implementation and its quality to develop the best conditions for children to develop and learn (The Swedish National Agency for Education, 2017). The systematic quality work in the Education Act is directed towards three different levels: national, local and unit (SFS, 2010:800). At a national level, the Swedish Agency of Inspection controls and evaluates if the local level follows the laws and curriculum (SFS, 2010:800). The Swedish Agency of Inspection directs their criticism to the local level, e.g. the local authority, and makes decisions about which action the local authority has to do in order to fulfil the steering documents for preschools. The local level, e.g. the local authority should at an overall level systematically and continuously plan, follow up and develop the preschool education. At the unit level, the systematic quality work should be performed in each preschool, where preschool teacher, caregivers, children and their guardians should have possibility to maintain. The heads of the preschools have the main responsibility for the systematic quality work activities, and the main focus in the systematic quality work should be on the goals for the education in the education act, as well as other national goals, e.g. the national curriculum (SFS, 2010:800). The systematic quality work should be documented, and activities, which are necessary, must take action.

In accordance with the Swedish Education Act (SFS 2010:800) and the revised preschool curriculum (The Swedish National Agency for Education, 2016a), preschools are now required to work systematically with quality issues to discern, evaluate and improve teaching and aspects of preschool that are important for children’s well-being, play, learning and development. The aim of the evaluation is to obtain knowledge of the quality of the preschool, that is, its organization, content and actions, as well as how teaching can be developed so that each child receives the best possible conditions for learning and development which involve develop better work processes (The Swedish National Agency for Education, 2017). An important aspect is the analysis of the results from the evaluation, which could indicate areas of development for the coming years.

The following section describes the importance of governance and management and its implication for preschool practice, as well as the importance of governance throughout systematic quality work.

**Governance and management in preschool**

This article primarily explores how the heads of preschools governance teaching in the preschool practice throughout the systematic quality work. Systematic quality work is an important part of governance and management in preschool, and from that point of view, this article builds on the concepts of governance and management. Sweeping changes in Swedish preschools’ structures have been carried out to alter the governance structure and influence preschool practice (e.g. Pierre, 2007). The introduction of the Educational Act (SFS, 2010:800) for preschools means that there are more governance documents from the state which influence the preschool practice especially the systematic quality work as well as teaching (cf. Nygärd, 2017). This means a clearer governing concerning the content as well as more demands on the competence of the staff (Nygärd, 2017). At the same time, decentralization of the school system in Sweden results in unclear political governance, and a larger number of actors create goals and norms for the work in preschools. The state formulates the laws and goals in the curriculum, but because of the decentralization, local authority also influences the practice with local goals.
Thus, there are three various levels in the governance of preschools: (a) the state/government, (b) local authority and (c) the preschool unit (e.g. Jarl et al., 2007). The governance and management of preschools depend on a high-quality, functioning quality system (e.g. Årlestig, 2011). The National Agency for Inspection is a type of control system by the state/government that involves governing by continuous inspections of the quality in preschools and further function as a regular supervision in a way for the state to investigate how preschool meets the national requirements. In a long run, these inspections are a form of governance to control the preschool work where the systematic quality work as a document is used for inspecting preschool practice (cf. Lindgren, 2015). This means that the overall control is viewed as support for the systematic quality work (Håkansson, 2016). This governing by the state affects the work in preschools by the National Agency for Inspection and its demands on preschool practice (Håkansson, 2016; cf. Lindgren, 2015). At local and unit level, an important issue concerning governing is the relation between the local authorities and the heads of preschools and their work at the preschool unit. The local authorities use, as well as the state/government, systematic quality work in governing the work in preschools. The heads of preschools are in between the external controls and demands and the needs of the preschool practice. The heads of preschool and their management are important when they have the overall responsible for quality and are responsible for systematically and continuously planning, following up, evaluating and developing the preschool’s practice (Håkansson, 2016; The Swedish National Agency for Education, 2016a, 2017).

There are three aspects for governing in preschool: legal, ideological and economical instruments, all of which influence each other (cf. Jarl et al., 2007; Nihlfors, 2003; Pierre, 2007). At the state level, the jurisdiction is concerned with, for example, the Swedish Education Act, curriculum, policies and the agency’s regulations, which also contains some ideological issues (Jarl et al., 2007). At the local and preschool level, systematic quality work is an ideological instrument to govern the practice (cf. Jarl et al., 2007). All forms of governance that are built on laws and regulations can be considered a type of control, which, to a considerable extent, is based on how resources should be used (Nihlfors, 2003). Different forms of governance were first goal-orientated governance indicate a desired result and where the goals might be more or less precise. Second, goal- and result-orientated governance is a combination of goals and demands that report the achieved results. Nihlfors argues that both forms of governance have an intention and direction expressed in values. Furthermore, Nihlfors argues that governance deals with decisions and controlling the rules, and it is a process created when the control system and its tools are used.

Goverance also has different approaches that can be direct or indirect, formal or informal while expressing the norms and values in different ways both verbally and through action. When governance is transformed in an implementation process, that is, the preschool practice, the governance has become a form of management (Nihlfors, 2003). Therefore, management is a process in which governance is transformed into the implementation processes where responsibility, i.e. the heads of preschool, for organization and the effects of the practice are carried out (cf. Nihlfors et al., 2015). The school director is, according to Nihlfors (2003), an expression of the shift from state control to professional municipal management. Nihlfors (2003) stated that management is a primary concept that deals with the organization of schools while governance is connected to school institutions.

Nihlfors (2003) argues that management assumes there is governance and that governance includes management. Furthermore, a distinction is made between leaders and leadership, where leadership deals with the direct contact between a leader and co-worker. Management, on the other hand, has a broader meaning, where all the tasks a leader should perform are included. Nihlfors (2003) pointed out that legal, economical and ideological governance – in which evaluation and monitoring is key – is identifiable, but the main points vary over time. This means that economic issues are incentives to govern ideologically as well. The choices the authorities make concerning evaluation areas show how the authorities value that particular area.

Method

In Sweden, each preschool must continuously and systematically plan, follow-up and develop its practices once a year to ensure the curriculum goals are fulfilled. This work is done once a year by the head of each preschool who write a systematic quality report. The method in this article consists of a text analysis of 120 systematic quality reports, 62 reports from the year 2015 and 58 reports from the year 2016, in a community in the northern part of Sweden.

To analyse a text means to review the structure of the text and scrutinize the content, which is done through a content analysis (McKee, 2003; Stemler, 2001). Content analysis is a method focused on the characteristic of language as communication with attention of content and contextual meaning of the text (Krippendorff, 2004; McTavish & Pirro, 1990; Tesch, 1990). It is used to study communication artefacts and to identify patterns in communication.
and involves systematic reading of text, which indicates the presence of interesting and meaningful patterns (Hodder, 1994). In this article, the analysis aimed to identify themes and patterns related to heads’ of preschools documentation of how teaching is used in the systematic quality reports. Thus, a qualitative content analysis was used because of the desire to see how the text describes certain phenomena (e.g. Kohlbacher, 2006), including (a) how the heads of preschools use the concept of teaching and (b) how they argue for how teaching must be pursued in the preschool’s daily practice. Furthermore, it was of interest to note what content the heads of preschools prioritized when talking about teaching. It was also interesting to examine what the text said about how the heads of preschools described how teachers pursued teaching in practice and how and in which context these words were used.

The systematic qualitative reports contained a large amount of text. Each report consisted of a median of 25 pages; there were 3000 total pages of text. The content analysis enabled the inclusion of substantial amounts of textual information and a systematic identification of its properties (Kohlbacher, 2006). Its strength lies in its stringent methodological control and step-by-step analysis of material. In other words, every element in the data collected is categorized into themes which are identified through secondary literature (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). In accordance with Hsieh & Shannon (2005) and Weber (1990), our content analysis proceeded through different stages: 1) each document was printed out. We copy and read through the transcript several times – a word-frequency count of the word ‘teaching’ was conducted, which included highlighting it with a marker. We also made brief notes in the margin beside every marked word and locating the more important structures of how the content of teaching was used: ‘In what situations is the concept of teaching used? How is it used? In which context is the concept of teaching used?’ From this, we found some patterns for how the word was used. 2) We went through the notes made in the margins and list the different types of information found. 3) We read through the list and categorize each item in a way that offers a description of what it was about. 4) We identified whether or not the categories could be linked any way and listed them as themes. We used, in line with Stemler (2001), emergent coding where we grouped the second, third and four step coding into categories and more abstract themes. From this, we identified two dimensions of the concept of teaching: (a) the responsibility of the head of a preschool for developing competence and (b) variation in teaching. To illustrate this, we used quotes from the text. This was done to ensure construct validity (Gibbert, Ruigrok, & Wicki, 2008). 5) We compared and contrasted the various themes and reviewed in order to ensure that the information is categorized as it should be. 6) We reviewed all of the categories and ascertain whether some categories can be merged or if some need to them be sub-categorized. 7) We returned to the original transcripts and ensure that all the information that needs to be categorized has been so.

The aim of this article was to investigate how the heads of preschools governance teaching in the preschool practice throughout the systematic quality work. We believe, that through the steps in the analysis process, we have answered the aim of this article. We present the results under each theme (the responsibility of the head of a preschool for developing competence and variation in teaching) supported by quotes from the developed themes. Thus, the results are presented in such a way that the reader is able to understand the basis of interpretations (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Krippendorff, 2004).

Results

In the systematic quality reports, the concept of teaching was not used by all the heads of preschools. In about 40% of the systematic quality reports, the concept was not mentioned at all, and in several of the reports, the concept was mentioned once or twice. In six of the reports, the concept was mentioned more than 10 times. The usage of the concept was unusual. However, the results for the heads of preschools who used the concept more frequently showed two dimensions of use: development of competence and variation in teaching. Noticeable, there was no common definition of the concept of teaching. Below, we will describe how the heads of preschools used teaching in relation to the development of competence and variation of teaching.

Development of competence

In relation to governance, the responsibility of the heads of preschools was an important factor. A common issue among the heads of preschools was the need to develop competence among all staff, particularly regarding how the staff should deepen their understanding of the teaching mission and how teaching in preschool shall pursue. In the systematic quality work reports, the heads’ responsibilities for developing the concept of teaching was hardly mentioned; instead, they expressed of how they organise all staff to develop their teaching competencies. It is mainly about develop staffs competence by participating in bookcircles. Bookcircles means that all staff first read a specific literature under a limited period of time in the free time and/or at the planning time of preschool connected to the teaching mission. Second,
they get together at a staff meeting and cooperating in the collegium by having collegial discussions based on the book, reflecting on their own practices and how to pursue the teaching mission. One head stated the following:

Bookcircles has been a regular element for the staff when they two times during one semester were ordered to read xxxx. In order to systematise the reflections from the book, the collegial discussions and reflections is done on staff meetings.

This describes a culture of reflection embedded in the preschool organization and that the collegial meeting focused on 'learning together' is very strong. It could enable reflection both individually and collegially, and it is expressed that when staff in preschool analyse and evaluate with their colleagues, it leads to better results for the children. However, there was no mention of what kind of result for children could be expected. Thus, there was no connection between the concept of teaching- and goal-oriented processes. The choice of collegial cooperation was built on the sentence that it affects staff and children more than individual competence development by its given opportunities to discussions and also offer possibilities for staff to be challenged in their prior ideas about teaching by other colleagues.

The heads of preschools highlighted that collegial cooperation among all staff was a strong force to develop teaching competencies. The heads included all staff, including caregivers as preschool teachers, and made no distinction between the various occupational categories in terms of preschool teacher's specific responsibility for teaching in preschool. There seems to be a collective responsibility of teaching in the whole collegium. The new responsibilities preschool teachers have were not visible, but rather, there was a structure of care and a democratic- and equivalence-oriented organization where the whole collegium are responsible for teaching. This indicates that the heads of preschools made preschool teachers responsible for teaching invisible and their governance and management in organizing the preschool practice enables the preschool teachers' responsibilities, and not following what the Swedish Education Act stipulates. However, this equivalence-oriented organization was mentioned by one heads of preschool as a problematic situation and a challenge to work with in the working team. This seemed to be necessary if preschool teachers are going to be able to take responsibility for children’s learning and development by teaching. The heads of preschool visualized this equivalence-oriented organization and how it becomes visible in practice by express the following:

A fair way of thinking between the occupational categories is widespread and needs to be challenged.

The head of a preschool working toward shaping processes and climate that provides opportunities to take responsibility for developing their skills to pursue good teaching.

The head pinpointed a fair way of thinking as factor that can affect their governance in relation to teaching. It becomes a duality when the head of the preschool also expressed that the preschool was working towards shaping processes and the climate to provide opportunities to take responsibility for developing preschool teachers' skills to pursue a good teaching. Even if preschool teachers are responsible for stepping forward and leading teaching in practice, there must be clarification by the heads of preschools governance where the division of responsibilities between the occupational categories needs to be emphasized. However, the heads of preschools expressed that this fair way of thinking needs to be challenged, which indicated that the division of labour was a difficult and sensitive issue. This might be why the heads of preschool chose to develop the competence of all staff, not focusing on preschool teachers. At the same time, the heads expressed that they worked towards shaping processes and a climate that could provide opportunities to take responsibility for developing preschool teachers' skills, as follows:

The responsibility imposed on various occupational categories also needs greater attention and to be challenged, which falls on both preschool teachers, heads of preschool, trade union organisations and local authorities.

That is, the heads of preschools govern in what they believe is a fair way rather than what the steering documents stipulate. The responsibility of creating teaching conditions for preschool teachers was expressed as a responsibility divided between the heads, the preschool teachers, local authorities and trade union organizations. The heads pushed their responsibility to other parties involved in the preschool practice. The heads also expressed that they were working towards shaping processes and climate that provides opportunities to take responsibility for developing preschool teachers' skills to pursue a good teaching. However, it was never mentioned how they were shaping processes and climate to accomplish that.

Here, the systematic quality work was an essential instrument for the heads where the work with how preschool teacher get prerequisite with being responsible for teaching is emphasized. The absence of this in relation to the concept of teaching has consequences for the preschool and the profession’s future development, which in turn will affect children’s learning and development in accordance with the intentions of the curriculum.
**Variation in teaching**

Another use of the word teaching in the systematic quality work is connected to variation in teaching. Variation in teaching is a concept used by the local authority to govern the whole school system and increase the students’ mathematics scores. Therefore, the heads of preschools have been ordered to develop preschool’s works with mathematics. Variation of teaching is by the local authority defined as something which should decrease individual student work and instead increase a teacher’s structural teaching. This involves communicative work, developing problem-solving skills and more practical mathematics not controlled by textbooks. The local authority’s governance of variation in teaching can be one aspect of why the heads of preschool use the concept in the systematic quality work where it is used in relation to that children should be given the best conditions for learning. One head expressed the following:

Variation in teaching is important so that all children should be given the best condition to learn and that we should get insight in how we should challenge every one of them.

This showed an awareness that variation in teaching is an important condition for children’s learning. Problematically, the heads did not connect variation in teaching to goal-oriented processes. That is, which goals in the curriculum variation in teaching strive for. Further, they did not connect variation in teaching to specific mathematics; rather, they applied the term to variation of material, environments and methods in all activities and subjects. Hence, variation in teaching was connected to activities that would not be considered goal-oriented processes; therefore, variation in teaching was not connected to the goals in the curriculum. Variation in teaching was mentioned in relation to different aspects, for example, organization of the environment, norms and values, aesthetic expressions and mathematics, but it was not mentioned in relation to goal-orientated processes and how preschool teachers teach in relation to goals. One head stated the following:

Children have access to a rich variety of different material, which creates good conditions for children to play and learn.

The heads of preschool equated variation in teaching with offering children different kinds of materials they could play and learn with. How the heads of preschool interpreted variation of teaching here showed that it is not how the local authorities defined the term, such as communicative work, and develops problem-solving skills. The heads of preschool did not show how variation in teaching would contribute to goal-orientated processes. The focus was not on how to plan or organize teaching, but rather, the focus was on offering more materials. Further, to give the children the best possible conditions, it is important to find out how staff should challenge every child in their learning process. That is, children’s access to a variety of materials can be expressed as variation in teaching. But it was not expressed what kind of variation of materials or what kind goal processes the children would achieve using a variety of materials. The heads of preschool did not define variation in teaching in the quality report. The use of the concept in the quality reports showed that the heads of the preschools did not relate variation of teaching to structural teaching from teachers’ problem-solving and communicative work. They mentioned the concept, but they did not show what they meant by the term and how it could be used in a preschool context. The governance from the local authority concerning the concept variation of teaching is interpreted in a various way by the heads of preschool.

**Discussion**

According to the two steering document, the Educational Act and the curriculum, preschool is required to work systematically with quality issues to discern, evaluate and improve aspects of preschool that are important for children’s learning and development. One of these aspects that are important for the quality is teaching when it is primary through teaching children’s learning and development shall be improved and challenged. The systematic quality work should be documented in a quality report which in turn is used as a control system from the government and the local authorities by continuous inspections of the quality. This means that the heads of preschool use the systematic quality work as governing and management of the preschool practice, and thus, how teaching is pursued in the preschool practice. The aim of this article was to explore how the heads of preschools govern teaching in practice through the systematic quality work by analysing systematic quality reports. The results showed an absence of governance and management among the heads of preschool concerning teaching. Teaching was used mainly according to the development of all staff competencies and variation in teaching. Moreover, it was mainly about organize development of competence of all staff (preschool teachers and caregivers) in preschool regarding the teaching mission. This was despite the fact that it is (a) the preschool teacher who is competent to teach in preschool and also is responsible for teaching and (b) the heads are responsible for organizing the preschool practice so that preschool teachers can pursue
teaching. In the efforts of developing the competencies of all staff, the heads made no clear division of responsibility and competence development for just preschool teachers. The division of work among preschool teachers and caregivers was not clarified; rather, all staff is mentioned as a group/collegium that should develop competence connected to the concept of teaching. This indicates that the heads of preschool managed the practice through a structure that is strongly influenced by a care and democracy-and equivalence-oriented organization (e.g. Rubinstein Reich et al., 2017). Further, this implies that the heads of preschool govern the practice in a way that made preschool teachers responsible for teaching invisible and that their governance and management in organizing the preschool’s practice and allocating responsibilities for teaching did not follow what Swedish Education Act stipulated (e.g. SFS, 2010:800). Following Nihlfors (2003) different kind of governance has intention and direction which expresses values. The approach heads of preschool express throughout the systematic quality work concerning teaching shows both formal and informal values. This influences action, and how the heads of preschool choose to express teaching in the systematic quality report and further show how they value the area (cf. Nihlfors, 2003). We therefore suggest that the heads of preschools need to express, clarify and implement the changes the Educational Act and the curriculum stipulate so that teachers can be able to take responsibility for teaching. They also need to clarify division of labour in preschool practice among preschool teachers and caregivers. The organization needs to enable these changes in the teacher’s new role and strengthen the preschool teachers’ leadership (cf. Rubinstein Reich et al., 2017). Otherwise, the heads of preschool will throughout their management continue to reduce the preschool teachers’ profession according to teaching and an absence in governance of how to prerequisite for preschool teachers to teach and how they shall proceed with teaching in their practice.

The results also indicate that the heads of preschool have limited knowledge concerning the concept of teaching, and there exists a lack of clarity regarding goal-orientated processes towards learning and development. The governance from the local authority has influenced the concepts the heads used, that is, variation in teaching. The problem is that the heads of preschool interpreted the local authority’s definition of variation in teaching in a way that did not match the local authority’s definition. What becomes problematic is that the heads of preschools mix the concept of variation in teaching. The heads associate that variation of materials, environments and methods was variation in teaching, not structural teaching that involves communicative work, developing problem-solving skills and more practical mathematics. The preschools offered children a variation of materials, environments and methods to use alone rather than having preschool teachers structure their teaching through the materials, environments and methods to stimulate and challenge children’s learning towards certain goals. This indicates that governance from the local authorities had not been transformed to management in preschool practice as the local authority demands. The lack of knowledge about how to transform variation in teaching to preschool practice can be explained by the fact that the governance from the local authority has not considered preschool conditions, rather to other school forms conditions.

Our results showed that governance from the Government in terms of the Educational Act and the curriculum has not been fully implemented in the heads of preschool management of the preschool practice. The governance that preschools implemented, as shown in the systematic quality reports, showed that their management of preschool practices was insufficient. There was a lack of showing how teaching activities have influenced children’s development and learning and to what extent teaching has contributed to the learning processes among the children. This indicates a lack in both forms of governance was neither goal-orientated governance and goal- and result-orientated governance becomes visible in the systematic quality reports concerning teaching (cf. Nihlfors, 2003). This also indicates that the concept of teaching has not been implemented in preschools practice and that the government’s governance and the local authority’s governance regarding the concept of teaching have not been apprehended by the heads of preschools. The governance from the government has not become management among the heads of preschools, as the way the Education Act stipulates. The governance from the politicians throughout the Education Act and the curriculum indicate a tension between the governance from the government and the management of the heads of preschools (cf. Pierre, 2007).

For policy, the curriculum and Swedish Education Act have different concepts of how the work to stimulate and challenge children’s learning and development. The curriculum stipulates that this shall be done in a process where the preschool’s practices will be conducted to challenge and stimulate children’s development and learning so that the children are given the best conditions for development and learning. The Swedish Education Act stated the purpose of preschool education in the same way but clarified that children’s learning and development must be through teaching. This duality that exists in these two steering documents can be considered problematic because those documents
have different focuses for preschool practice and their leaders. To fulfil the Swedish Education Act, a division of labour is needed between preschool teachers and caregivers. The lack of clarity from the heads of preschools and their governance concerning the concept teaching means that it is hard for preschool teachers to organize and plan teaching. The results of the current study strongly showed that the two steering documents should use the same concepts for the preschool teachers’ mission. In order to give prerequisite for preschool teacher to pursue with teaching in preschool, our results also strongly suggest a need for a revised curriculum with a clarification of the question of how teaching in preschool should be interpreted and be understood to be applied in preschool practice. Today the definition of teaching is defined by the Educational Act in a way that consist all school form in the overall educational system despite the fact that the practices and curriculums in these different school forms are different from each other. It is needed to pay more attention to define and clarify what teaching in preschool is and how it shall be interpreted in preschool practice.

Conclusions

Teaching is a new concept since 2011 in preschool practice. That means that the preschool practice should be organized in order to challenge and improve children’s learning and development through teaching. Thus, how teaching is organized in preschool practice to improve and challenge children’s learning and development becomes an important part in the systematic quality work. Our results indicate a lack in how the heads of preschools govern teaching in preschool practice throughout the systematic quality work and that it exists a limited knowledge among heads of what teaching in preschool is. It exists lack of how teaching activities influence children’s development and learning and to what extent teaching has contributed to the learning processes among the children. This is problematic when it is through teaching children’s learning and development shall be improved and challenged. It is necessary to take actions and our conclusions are that there needed a) a definition of what teaching in preschool is and a clarification in the steering documents of how teaching in preschool should be interpreted and be understood to be applied in preschool practice, b) clear governing from the heads of preschool by organizing the practice so preschool teacher has prerequisite to pursue teaching. This includes a clear division of responsibilities between the two occupational categories preschool teachers and caregivers, c) a revision of the curriculum and bring in the concept of teaching. Otherwise, it becomes problematic for heads of preschool to govern when it is a duality between the two steering documents.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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