Play and Education from a Swedish Perspective

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Introduction

This chapter looks at children and play in Swedish preschools and wrap-around care. It refers to the new preschool curriculum which came into effect in July 2019, where 'instructional teaching' (undervisning) is now a requirement for the first time. The chapter will explore how 'undervisning' is in the process of being redefined to suit the play-ethos of preschool education.

The chapter is divided into five parts. First, it presents a brief introduction to the education system in Sweden, including the different education levels of the educators. This will be followed by a closer look at play in preschools, preschool classes and fritids, referring to how the curriculum values play and how this is being translated into the daily lives of educators and children in the settings. The word preschool will be used when referring to Swedish 'förskola' (ages 1–5), preschool class when

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referring to 'förskoleklass' (6 year olds) and the Swedish word 'fritids' when referring to the wrap-around care for school children aged six to twelve. This will be followed by exploring outdoor play and digital play, two forms of play that are found in the three different types of settings in a variety of ways. The chapter will conclude with reflections on the play available to children ages one to twelve attending Swedish preschool, preschool class and fritids.

A Brief Look at the Swedish Education System

The Swedish education system starts with preschool for children between the ages of one and six. In the August of the year the child turns six, their education continues in the preschool class, which is located in a school environment. After this introductory year children start the first grade of school. Nine grades are divided into three—primary, intermediate and secondary (lågstadiet, mellanstadiet and högstadiet). Years F-9 (preschool class to ninth grade) are obligatory; preschool and gymnasiet (a three-year sixth form programme) are not obligatory but the majority of children/youth attend them. Of these, 84.4% continue to gymnasiet (Skolverket, 2018a 2018b) and 84% attend preschool with a range of 47% of one-year olds and 94% of five-year olds (Eurydice, 2020).

Prior to the introduction of the curriculum in 1998, preschools were known as 'daghem' (dayhome) but were fondly referred to as dagis (Carlsson & Focklin, 2007; Kärrby, 2000). Dagis is still a much-used term by many, even over twenty years after the shift from the social services to the Swedish National Agency of Education known as Skolverket in Swedish. Preschool and fritids in Sweden are heavily subsidised and are available to all children from the age of one until the summer of the year they finish sixth grade. There is no homeschooling option in Sweden because school, not education, is the legal requirement. In Swedish language this is known as 'skolplikt' – school duty (Berg, 2003). The training of educators in the preschool and school systems differs from each other not only in content, but also in duration. In the preschools there are teachers with a three-and-half-year university education, 210ECTS (Stockholm University, 2020a) and nursery nurses (barnskötare) which is

a gymnasie (sixth form) equivalent programme. In schools F-6 teachers study for 4 years, 240ECTS (Stockholm University, 2019) and teachers of grades 7–9, known as subject teachers, train for between 4 years and 5.5 years (240-330ECTS) depending on their subject (Stockholm University, 2020b). Also found in schools are 'fritids' teachers. 'Fritids' is not only wrap-around care but the teachers are often connected to the preschool class as extra support to teachers during the school day to enable small group work. These fritids educators have a three-year university education, 180ECTS (Stockholm University, 2019). ECTS is the European Credit Transfer System; in Swedish these credits are referred to as "hp" Higher Education Points (EC website).

Preschool and Play

Swedish preschools are legally required to be open from 6:30 am to 6:30 pm and it is implied in all the social media groups I participate in that 'undervisning' (teaching/instruction) should occur throughout the day as planned lessons and spontaneous pedagogical interactions. The focus in collegial dialogues tends to be around how to plan time for learning and less often about how to plan time for the children's own free play, even though the lesson planning is based on play. "Undervisning" or teaching is a part of the preschool day in Sweden but there is no schedule of lessons and breaks like there is in schools. As the curriculum states that lessons can be spontaneous (Skolverket, 2018a, 2018b), this can mean young children can be exposed to lessons, or lesson-like activities, at any point in the twelve hours a centre is open. In the preschool class and school, it is stated how much time should be given to lessons, as in the number of hours per week, but none of the educational policies state for how much time children need breaks from learning, only that they have the right to them and that lessons and breaks should be designed in the children's best interests. This is quite different from teachers' rights to breaks, which is a legal requirement for schools and it also specifies how long they should be (Skolverket, 2019; Lärarnas Riksförbund, 2019). The preschool curriculum (Skolverket, 2018a, 2018b) states that teaching should be well balanced with rest based on the developmental needs

of the children and the duration of their stay, as children can typically stay anywhere from three hours to twelve hours in the same group/class.

As the new Swedish preschool curriculum becomes more focused on subjects and teaching, while still based on the foundation of play, I can sense this balancing act of teacher-led and child-led, of rules and freedom, of lessons and play is becoming ever more precarious. Ensuring there is an appropriate amount of play is a concern that is reflected globally in early years education (Gunnirsdottir, 2014; Johansson & Pramling Samuelsson, 2006; Lester & Russell, 2010; Nicolopoulou, 2010; Shipley, 2008; Walsh et al., 2017). Granberg (2003) reflects that play should not be used as a teaching method, but that children learn through play. However, this does not necessarily mean that there should be no teaching.

My theory of Original Learning (Axelsson, 2018) suggests that there needs to be adequate time to play in order to process the lessons taught/learned, and that there is a play and learning equality where the two are interwoven. Lessons can absolutely be playful, or play-filled, but this should not be confused with play. King and Newstead (2019) write about childcare workers' understanding of play as a process rather than play as a product, referring to the Play Cycle Theory (Sturrock & Else, 1998) as a tool to gain a deeper understanding of recognising children's play. Play as a process rather than product implies that it cannot be used as a tool to make teaching more fun but has its own inherent value. Pramling and Wallerstedt (2019) explain what they mean by play-responsive teaching and how it differs from play-based teaching:

> Teaching is theorized as an activity – that is, as something mutually constituted by participants (preschool teachers and children) – in contrast to instruction as an action… Play is understood in this perspective not as something to base teaching on (so called playbased teaching), as something that can subsequently be left behind *(product)*; rather, teaching is understood as inherently responsive to play, as a potential dimension of any teaching activity in preschool (*process*). (p. 8)

Play-based learning, learning through play, play-based preschool didactics, child-directed learning, and pedagogy of play are terms that are being frequently used to describe the play, learning and teaching dynamic

(Thomas et al., 2011; Pramling et al., 2019; Siraj-Blatchford, 2009) and can sometimes add to the confusion of what is play, what is learning and what is playful learning. Pramling and Wallerstedt (2019) write, "two questions that are at stake today are the role of *play* in preschool teaching, and how the learning *content* (alternative goal) that is addressed is viewed" (p. 9). These are, indeed, important questions, not only for the early years sector but for schools too. How educators are trained to see play, learning and teaching as a process, rather than teaching being a product that is being transferred to children (with play as one of those tools), is a pertinent question for the evolving Swedish preschool.

Granberg (2003) writes that adult attitudes towards play can often interfere with the actual play; for instance, the idea that all children *can* play or *should* play *with* each other, or that all children *must participate* in the play, biases educators when they observe children playing. This can result in subverting the children's natural play instead of enabling the children's play, especially when it comes to supporting those children who are struggling with play (or appear to be struggling from an adult perspective). Folkman and Svedin (2003) describe play like rings on water, that if the play is functioning the rings ripple outwards positively impacting their social interactions, academic learning and so on; therefore, a functioning play ecosystem can result in more effective lessons, just as play-responsive teaching will maximise the children's learning without compromising their agency (Pramling et al., 2019).

In Anna Wirsén's paper (2003) two preschool teachers were interviewed, one newly qualified and the other with almost 40 years of experience. What was interesting to read in their descriptions of free play in preschools was that the more experienced teacher had seen a remarkable difference in children's *ability* to play, reflecting that children required more adult intervention to play successfully in groups than previously.

Both teachers reflected on outdoor play as a space where children get to play more freely, partly because this is when the adults stand around and talk with each other. The two teachers see this somewhat differently from each other. One thinks that it is not good that there are staff just chit-chatting, while the younger one thinks it is natural due to there being so little time for the adults to discuss with each other. Personally, I have mixed opinions about this based on my experiences working in

preschools for over 20 years. There is a need to talk with colleagues and discuss the learning and play that has been observed and there is a lack of adequate time for collegial reflection. On the other hand, I have also experienced many in the preschool yard that are not talking about work, the children or play but chatting about their own personal lives with each other, and only react when they hear problems and step in as the 'fixer'. I do not think this is a particularly Swedish dilemma, and is more than likely found across the globe. Does this imply that free play is an accidental phenomenon due to the fact that the adults are not paying attention, rather than it being a deliberate choice of the adults to step back and be visibly invisible, observing and learning from the children's play? And how does this impact the quality of the children's play context? This brings me back to King and Newstead's research (2019) about supporting Early Years Practitioners (EYP) to better understand play using the play cycle, to observe play with intentionality in order to improve quality.

Olofsson Knutsdotter (2003) talks about children who are unable to play in preschools and the challenge this presents for teachers, as they need to work out if it is due to the child not feeling secure, not being aware of the play codes/signals or problems at home. She also talks about the importance of the educators as play role models to enable these children to interpret the rules of play. My Swedish social media feed is often filled with comments and images of how adults should not be participating in play, and that their very presence means it stops it being play. Mixed messages of what educators should be doing is confusing to well-intentioned adults striving to offer the best play and learning provision.

Preschool Class, Fritids and Play

In 1990 it was decided that six-year olds should be provided a placement in schools instead of preschools and by 1997 this process was completed (Pramling Samuelsson & Mauritzson, 1997), creating the preschool class (at first called grade 0), a bridge between preschool and school. In 1994, a national investigation (Statens offentliga utredningar (SOU), 1994:45) explored the possible consequences of starting school at age six instead of seven and came to the conclusion that schools would require change in

order to meet the needs of six-year olds and to avoid the risk that many children would experience a sense of academic failure and be turned off learning. Recently, in 2018, the preschool class became obligatory for all children. This change in the freedom to attend preschool class, or not, is rooted in several factors. The main reason for Sweden opting for 'skolplikt' rather than education to be a legal requirement is equality. The preschool class has now become a part of a ten-year compulsory education and the Swedish government is striving to ensure that the two percent of children who were not attending preschool class are accessing the daily six hours of term-time education. Another reason given for starting at age six by the Swedish government is that seven is relatively late compared to an international perspective (Utbildningsutskottet, 2017; Ackesjö, 2019). Finally, starting in autumn 2019, new compulsory evaluation forms in math and Swedish need to be completed on every child. These are designed to be able to ensure that no child is left behind and is given the support they need to attain the Knowledge Requirements by the end of grade 3 (Skolverket, 2011). The preschool class remains a bridge between preschool and school with a clearer focus on school preparation.

Preschool class and fritids are included in the school curriculum, each with its own chapters specialising in its specific needs. Under the heading 'The Task of the School' (which is written for all three school forms—preschool class, school and fritids), the school curriculum states, "Creative and investigative activities and play are essential components of active learning. In the early years of schooling, play in particular is of great importance in helping pupils to acquire knowledge" (Skolverket, 2018a, 2018b, p. 8). Johansson and Pramling-Samuelsson (2006) write that play in schools tends to be a method for learning and teaching while in preschools play has its own value. How play is being viewed impacts the kind of play children have access to, and also complicates dialogues about whether children are getting enough play within the educational system.

Fritids is available to children aged 6 to 12 at a heavily subsidised cost to parents. Over the years group sizes have been increasing while the number of educators has not (Ackesjö, 2011). Despite the fact it is called 'free time' in Swedish, this is considered a pedagogical part of the day where there is homework help and also learning through play. It

also has its own curriculum where the word ‘undervisning’ (teaching) is frequently used and all the school subjects are covered. The fritids curriculum (Skolverket, 2011) is more reminiscent of the preschool curriculum (2018) that guides the educators to include math, literacy, creative expression and so on, rather than being like the school curriculum, which is more learning-content specific. Of all the 6–12 year olds, 57% attend fritids, 89% are 6–9 year olds and groups consist on average of about 39 children (Skolverket, 2019). As a nation, Sweden continually strives towards equity within the school system. However, the fact that not all attend this pedagogical wrap-around care, with the same opening times as preschool, raises the question: Are some children disadvantaged because they do not attend fritids (Supstiks & Åkesson, 2016)?

One could describe fritids as a space for well-regulated free play. Pedagogical activities, dividing children into smaller groups, or organising excursions are offered as options to choose ‘freely’ between. Pihlgren and Rohlin (2011) write about school and fritids creating a whole, where children can be exposed to formal and informal learning as well as free play. They also point out that this free play becomes more and more reduced as fritid educators become more learning goals based and there is less space to play in. In July 2019 it was decided that fritids should also have a minimum of at least one legitimised fritids-teacher at every setting. In Sweden educators are required to be both qualified and legitimised. It costs 1500 Swedish krona for a fritids-teacher legitimation and without this certificate adults can only work as a fritids-teacher on a one-year contract or take on the ‘lesser’ title of fritids-leader (Lärarförbundet, 2019). The same qualification route applies to preschool and school teachers too, to qualify from a teacher training programme and then to apply and pay for legitimisation.

Hansen Orwehag and Mårdsjö Olsson (2011) write about the strengths and weaknesses of the informal learning that occurs at fritids, where play allows children to learn through their interests but does not make the learning as visible and obvious as it is during school hours. Play is seen as the foundational learning method in fritids, even though free play is something that many see as essential for preschool and school-aged children (Dahl & Englesson, 2015; Miller, 2013; Hakkarainen, 2006). Arnell and Lundbäck (2015) write that the fritids educators that they

interviewed all found it easier for free play to occur outside rather than inside, due to space and the number of children, and that many were uncertain of what the balance between free play and teacher-directed play should be. Boverket and Movium (2014) write

> When the school was municipalized, a large part of it moved educare into the school premises, which they were not built for originally. Today, 80 percent of children aged 6–9 are enrolled in the educare centres, of which three quarters are housed in the school premises. For these children, the school environment is the only outdoor environment they have access to during weekdays (p. 12)

If children attend a school that has a small or no yard, this seriously reduces their free-flow access to outdoor play and makes them entirely dependent on the attitudes of the fritids educators to outdoor play and activities.

Outdoor Play

There is a Swedish proverb (that rhymes in Swedish) that there is no bad weather, only bad clothes, and this proverb is very much in tune with the attitudes of the Swedish people and the outdoors. The outdoors is used every day, whether it be the pre/school yard, the forest, or nearby parks or public spaces. Risk assessments do not need to be completed to take children outside of school property and this gives freedom to both teachers and children to choose their destination, sometimes just before they leave the premises. As an increasing number of settings do not have their own yard or have a space that is unsuitable for all of the children simultaneously, being able to utilise the neighbourhood and the whole city is essential (El Faraj & Kärvegård, 2010).

The preschool/school yard is a space that is not only used during school hours in Sweden, as they are also public spaces for play in the evenings, weekends and school breaks. This has both benefits and disadvantages. The benefits are that there are extra spaces for children's play, close to their homes, and these are spaces that the children are familiar with. The

disadvantages include the need for secure storage of any loose equipment used during school hours, as well as the extra wear and tear on the equipment and vandalism. Research (Wells, 2000; Haluza et al., 2014) indicates that green and natural outdoor spaces are the best for the cognitive development and well-being of the children, but sadly these are often the areas that are subject to the most wear and tear and vandalism, and the cost of replacement is expensive. Christofferson (2014) suggests that this might lead to cities and school authorities replacing natural areas with more durable hard surfaces.

There is much research available on the importance of the school and preschool yard for the social and cognitive development of children as well as their well-being and health (Mårtensson, 2012; Söderström et al., 2013; Sandseter, 2011; Fägerstam, 2012) not just for usage during break times/free play, but also as part of lesson planning and the concept of the outdoor classroom.

Risky play is something children have controlled access to, and an ever-increasing protective layer seems to be being added to the role of the educator. Emma Adbåge's (2018) children's book *Gropen* (The Hollow) shares the story of children seeking exciting play in the small natural hollow on school grounds and how the educators can only see the danger and are unable to see the play and the benefits, or to adequately assess where accidents are actually happening, as the only accident in the story happens when a child trips down the steps of the school entrance. The story maybe reflects the real-life situation of many preschools, preschool classes and fritids where children are gaining less and less access to the spaces that allow exciting, open-ended play that has uncertain outcomes. Gill (2018) writes about risky play and how it is perceived and how it often causes anxiety in adults more than it should and therefore limits children's access to risky play. Ball et al. (2019) also confirm this and suggest that there is a need for educators to be provided with risk benefit assessment frameworks and a broader perspective of risks and dangers in play and daily life.

Outdoor and digital play are increasingly being reflected on as a way of breaking down the borders of how they are traditionally seen and to have a more transdisciplinary approach. For example, digital microscopes and cameras are being used in a variety of ways outside. Equally, outside play

is being brought inside to be experienced once more through another medium, for example, watching their filmed outdoor-play, or continuing learning/play with indoor materials using images the children/teachers have just taken outside projected onto a wall (Nilsson & Åkervall, 2016).

Digital Technology and Play

The European Parliament (EP) (2006) identified eight key competences for life-long learning, one of those being digital competence. The new Swedish preschool curriculum (Skolverket, 2018a, 2018b) also requires educators to provide a play and learning environment that enables children to be adequately digitally competent. According to Forsling (2011), digital competence includes possessing basic Information and Communications Technology (ICT) skills, that is, to be able to retrieve, assess, produce, store and communicate with and through digital media.

This means that digital play and learning is now required in Sweden from the age of one, when the new preschool curriculum became legally active in July 2019. Lagergren and Holmberg (2019) introduce their chapter about digital play and learning with the following statement:

> Digitization in the early years is not about digital technology itself, it is not just about hardware or software. It is very much about the children and the staff. People who learn and develop together with digital technology. It's about what users do together with the digital tools and systems. (p. 15)

The idea is that digital play is not simply about time spent gaming and using pedagogical apps on screens but that a wide range of digital tools can be used for children to explore the world through play. Digital cameras, computers, apps, projectors, bluetooth, internet, mobile phones, printers and so on have changed the conditions of play and learning for the children, but also for educators, including how they document and access pedagogical material, and the experiences they can offer children. My experience of holding digital play workshops is that many educators have a preconceived idea of what digital means—often 'screen-time'—and usually a limited use of those screens, which often creates a negative attitude towards digital play landscapes as they are not seen as open ended.

In Sweden, 87% of children aged between birth and ten years use the internet, with about half of those using it on a daily basis (Internet Stiftelsen, 2019). There has also been an increase in the use of the internet by preschool children from 2018 to 2019, from 42% to 48%. There is a clear change in the accessibility of the internet, including 8% of preschool children having their own mobile phone by the time they start school and 54% of Swedish seven-year olds having their own mobile. The statistics above indicate a changing landscape of contemporary play, where technology and digital tools are now play materials like blocks, dolls and dress-up clothes. Edwards (2013) argues that there is a need to reconsider the relationship between traditional and contemporary play, using the term "converged play". By this she refers to play that relates to children's popular culture, which the statistics show includes digital and technological tools.

The new preschool curriculum (Skolverket, 2018a, 2018b) requires educators to provide a play and learning environment that allows children to develop "adequate digital skills" (p. 10). As mentioned, according to Forsling (2011), digital competence includes being able to retrieve, assess, produce, store and communicate with and through digital media. The Swedish Internet Foundation (SIF) (Internet Stiftelse, 2019) shares figures showing that the majority of preschool children accessing the internet, primarily by tablets, are using it to watch films and programmes. As an educator I have aimed to provide adequate digital competence by exposing the children to experiences that allow them to discover more uses of the tablet than just being a consumer, focusing them, instead, on being producers.

A reason for being digitally competent, given by a preschool teacher to Kjällander (2017), is to understand that it is people behind the designing and programming of computers, games and robots and that with young children this is best learnt by doing—by creating and playing with digital tools, including developing early programming skills. Kjällander (2017) talks about how digital play and exploration has enabled educators to better understand young children's play, learning and thoughts in a way that analogue play, drawing and talking has not been able to due to the fact that the children are so young that their fine motor skills and language skills have not yet developed enough to communicate their full

capacity of comprehension and creative/critical thinking. Digital literacy allows children to communicate through colours and symbols: tablets do not require the same finger dexterity as writing/drawing or computer keyboards. Digital literacy (Kjällander, 2014) also allows children to think and write simultaneously, where pen and paper requires a child to think first, then write. This simultaneous thinking and doing can provide a space of play and creativity, as it is more forgiving when making mistakes or changing your mind to adjust the text on a screen than it is on paper.

The Swedish Media Council (Statensmedieråd, 2017) have examined the changes in children's usage of media, including a report on how young children (0–8 years) access and use various forms of media. The report (p. 11) reveals that it is relatively uncommon for the youngest children to use the internet and digital games on a daily basis, but that this is slowly increasing over the years and, at age eight, it exceeds the amount of daily reading, and then daily television viewing somewhat later (daily internet use becomes more common at age 9 and daily digital gaming at 10). With this in mind, introducing digital play and learning into educational settings, even as early as preschool, can be seen as an important approach to enable children and their parents to see digital tools, including tablets, as something more than a place for gaming and a tool to entertain children while making dinner. Allowing children to develop a digital competence that enables them to think critically about their digital consumerism, and how technology can enhance play, learning and development, is an essential future skill.

In the curriculum, children are encouraged to explore and play with "digital and other tools" (Skolverket, 2018a, 2018b, p. 15). This does not suggest that the digital should replace the analogue, but simply that digital tools should be used if they can enhance the play and learning in a way analogue tools are unable to. Kjällander (2017) says that children should be active, creative producers and not passive consumers. Digital play is a new realm of play for many educators and there are many pitfalls, including tablets being used in a babysitting-like manner to keep children quiet.

From a sustainable point of view, digital play can allow children to explore without the same waste, as colour apps, art apps and so on can provide opportunities to be creative in a repetitive manner without the

paper waste. This, of course, should be combined with real-life art techniques and media to expose children to the full sensory experience of art—sound, smell, touch (vibration shifts of different materials interacting with each other), even taste, and not just sight.

Technology and social norms have been rapidly evolving, and continue to do so (Valdez et al., 1999; Holliman, 2011). Terms such as 'digital native' and 'digital immigrant' exist to explain the difference between those who are born into a world of digital tools and those who were born without them (Prensky, 2013). As technology evolves, so does expectation.

As an educator I have been in the field long enough to have started documenting with children using analogue cameras, to the early days of expensive digital cameras, and now the accessibility of cameras on phones. I have also witnessed how preschool children have had little to no access to technology, due to cost, or the fact computer and mouse usage was not optimal for young hands, compared with today where it would be hard to find a preschool in Sweden where children do not have easy access to a digital medium of one kind or another. Social media demonstrates this access, as many Swedish preschools, or educators, have an account and sharing digital play and exploration is well 'liked'.

Digital tools have allowed children to participate more in the documentation of their own play and learning, as educators no longer need to worry about the cost of developing film when taking photographs, and films can be taken, deleted and new ones produced. This creates opportunities for children to play with the digital tools, for example, playing with the slow motion function, or making their own stop motion or time lapse films. Children also get the opportunity to experiment with digital tools like the digital microscope. This experimental play can then be projected onto walls or screens and the children can engage through play once more. This can provide opportunities for multi-directional learning (Loyens & Gijbels, 2008) through play exploration, in the sense that children are learning from each other through a shared experience and the educator is learning not only what the children are interested in, but often also how technology can be used beyond their own imagination. Educators are most often the 'immigrants' in the digital world and time taken observing digital natives at play could offer an opportunity to speed up the process of digital inclusion as a non-native. There is now a

generation of digital natives just entering the profession as educators, so change is coming. This change has been experienced by many educators turning to the digital world in order to reach out to children during the Covid-19-induced lockdowns of 2020.

The Swedish National School Authority (Skolverket) offers several online courses for teachers in preschool, preschool class and fritids to learn more about digital play and learning, including courses that explore the impact of digital tools on identity and equality, children's integrity, and how they can be best implemented.

Natural social interactions and creative play may be disturbed by the introduction of digital play outside (Hitron et al., 2018), so there needs to be careful reflection on how tools can and are being used. Digital tools should be used to enhance the play and the relationships that exist and not be the main event of the activities and/or play (Lagergren & Holmberg, 2019, Kjällander, 2017), instead blurring the borders between digital and analogue to create a new playscape, rather than one or the other.

Conclusion

It seems apparent that play is evolving and that our traditional way of viewing play is being challenged by the play of the digital natives. There is also a continued need to encourage children to play outside and use their whole bodies. There are companies designing playscapes that include physical and digital elements, both indoors and outdoors (Sallnäs Pysander, 2018), that are being researched to better understand this new playscape of digital *and* analogue, both indoors *and* outdoors. A playscape that reflects the childhood of today.

There is a need for adults to understand play and childhood, to be able to fully understand how children are communicating and learning and to be able to facilitate that as play-responsive educators (Pramling et al., 2019). The curriculums in Sweden have been evolving, as have the definitions of the various educators in the Swedish education system where the focus on education and teaching has been taking a more prominent role. This has not involved play being less important, but there is always

a risk that there are misinterpretations and more focus on teaching that usurps the power of play. Eidevald et al. (2020) shared recently their concerns that on 9 March 2020, the Swedish Government (SOU, 2020) initiated an investigation into changing the preschool class into the first grade of school, stating that it is detrimental for children to start with formalised learning too young. My own concern is what happens to the bridge between preschool and school if this happens: will, in the near future, five-year olds become that bridge?

My social media feed, a source of inspiration and dialogue in the digital teacher's repertoire, is filled with exchanges between my British counterparts who tend to focus on how to ensure there is enough play in the learning, while here in Sweden we are discussing how to weave teaching into the play. Pramling and Wallerstedt (2019) assume this is due to the British early years, being based on clearer features of school preparation and school-like forms of work organised into lessons, while Swedish schools have evolved from a Fröbelian play-based learning. It seems that play has become subversive to the intention of the curriculum, when the curriculum is goal focused, so despite teachers knowing that play is good for children, there is a lack of time and space for it to be woven naturally and effectively into the rhythm of the classes' learning agenda. Pramling and Wallerstedt (2019) write, "One cannot then say that preschool teachers teach (or should teach) but instead that in their role as a preschool teacher is to involve children in shared activities of a teaching kind" (p. 14). Can play-responsive teaching ensure that play not only survives and thrives in an educational environment, but also continues to evolve and the teachers' understanding of play with it?

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