



Responsibility for teaching: a missed opportunity?

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ABSTRACT: In recent years the concept of teaching has been introduced in the Swedish preschool curriculum. A specific responsibility for teaching has been appointed to preschool teachers. This study aims to increase the knowledge of how responsibility for teaching can be understood in a preschool context. The empirical data consist of audio recordings of seventeen staff meetings. One of the meetings' explicit goals was to strengthen the role of preschool teachers as responsible pedagogical leaders for teaching in preschool. The audio recordings were transcribed and analysed through some of the key concepts of Bernstein's theory of the pedagogical practice: classification, framing, horizontal and vertical discourse. The results show that preschool teachers in this study more often address responsibility for leading preschool as a pedagogical practice rather than a specific responsibility for teaching. The collective responsibility of the work team is seen as auspicious although different understandings of the educational mission are addressed as problematic. When responsibility for teaching is more clearly addressed, feelings of pressure and uncertainty are expressed as well as the need for more support.

Keywords: *preschool teachers, responsibility for teaching, pedagogical discourse, Bernstein*

Introduction

An increased focus on preschool as an arena for learning follows international trends that emphasise the importance of good quality provision for the youngest children, both as a way to improve social equality and as a means of economic growth (e.g., Heckman, 2011;

OECD, 2017). In Sweden recent changes in policy documents such as the Education Act (SFS, 2010:800) and the national curriculum for preschool (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2018) introduced the concept of “teaching” as central to preschool education. The Education Act definition of teaching is that of a goal-oriented activity that takes place in an educational context under the leading of licensed preschool teachers.

Although policy changes in Sweden have been taking place during a time of debate on public education, where the increasing shortness of qualified teachers is often brought to attention as well as a deterioration of the work conditions (Tallberg Broman & Persson, 2019), the curriculum (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2018) attempts to clarify how teaching in preschool can be understood in the preschool educational context as a goal-oriented process to be carried under the leadership of preschool teachers who are supposed to assume responsibility for it. Thus, the preschool teachers are assigned a specific responsibility to lead teaching in accordance with the goals expressed in the national curriculum. Furthermore, the goals to strive for are meant to give direction to the educational mission. The work team, composed of preschool teachers, childminders and in some cases also of colleagues without any specific pedagogical education for working with young children, is supposed to give active contributions, thus promoting the overall educational mission and the teaching as a part of it.

However, the concept of teaching has aroused concern for schoolification as a potential negative outcome of the above-mentioned policy changes (e.g. Eidevald & Engdahl, 2018) where schoolification stands for school pedagogy, perceived as focusing mainly on formal and academic learning. Preschool teachers’ perception of the concept of teaching in Sweden has been explored in several studies. For instance the results of Jonsson et al. (2017) point to teaching as perceived both as an increased demand as well as a right for all children. Teaching was perceived as demanding, especially in relation to goal-orientation and planning. On the other hand, Jonsson et al. (2017) could see how preschool teachers have initiated an elaboration of the concept of teaching and were more prone to commit to it. Vallberg Roth (2018) investigates what characterises teaching in preschool through both preschool teachers’ and preschool principals’ written accounts. The result shows the author defining high and low traces. “High traces” stands for frequent characterisation of teaching. High traces were found in teaching conceived as everything, thus with a diffuse meaning. Moreover “learning” was frequently used in the descriptions almost as having the same meaning of teaching (e.g. Swedish Schools Inspectorate, 2018).

Furthermore, child-centredness was found to be another high trace in the characterisation of “teaching”. Hildén et al. (2018) investigate preschool principals’ expectations and experiences of teaching in preschool. Their study sheds light on how the

concept of teaching is filled with an expectation of retaining what is perceived as specific for preschool, while at the same time the responsibility for teaching has introduced a challenging element. While the importance of taking the child's perspective has been highlighted as significant for teaching in preschool (e.g. Melker et al., 2018; Thulin & Jonsson, 2018) a problematisation of some of the underlying assumptions of child-centredness has been discussed in several studies. For instance, discussing the relationship between play and learning, Yelland (2011) argues that the assumption that children learn through play leaves unanswered the question of what they learn, thus suggesting that the role of the teacher should be significantly supportive in order to expand children's learning. Björklund et al. (2018) argue that play and teaching should not be understood as dichotomies. An integration between the curriculum goal-orientation and play open-ended orientation is needed for learning as intended in the Swedish national curriculum to take place (Björklund & Palmér, 2019; Pramling et al., 2019).

Thus, through an increased critical examination of child-centredness (e.g. Osberg & Biesta, 2010), the role of the teacher for children's learning has been emphasised, bringing forth the concept of teaching as appropriate to the field of early childhood education (e.g. Hatch, 2010; McLaughlin et al., 2016).

The purpose of this study is to increase the knowledge of how responsibility for teaching can be understood in a preschool context. More specifically, it sheds a light on the challenges connected to preschool teachers' responsibility for teaching expressed during collegial meetings.

Theoretical approach

The strategies that the adults in an early childhood setting adopt to support children's learning can be considered a form of pedagogy (Siraj-Blatchford, 2008). Furthermore, pedagogy aims to guide individuals participating in the pedagogical practice as it is based on values that are held as important. The concept of pedagogy can therefore also be understood as a process of education which, in institutional contexts such as school or preschool, includes the practice of teaching (e.g. Uljens, 2001).

To understand the expressed meanings of responsibility for teaching in the studied preschool context, I turn to Bernstein's theory of pedagogy (2000). Bernstein developed a complex theory that strives to account for several dimensions of pedagogical practice. Some of Bernstein's conceptual tools are used to shed light on the meanings that are expressed in relation to responsibility for teaching. As Bernstein (2000) puts it, a pedagogical practice can be described through the degrees of classification and framing,

which he means can vary from strong to weak. Strong classification implies that the boundaries between different categories are clearly demarcated, such as in the case of school subjects. Weak classification instead implies a looser demarcation between categories. Where there is a strong classification there is a more specialised pedagogical discourse with more specialised divisions of labour (roles), while a weak classification implies a pedagogical discourse less specialised and with less demarcated roles. Thus, it implies that a strong classification also carries specialised identities.

The concept of framing is used at the level of communication and interaction in the pedagogical discourse. Bernstein describes framing as “the *internal logic* of the pedagogical practice” (Bernstein, 2000, p. 12). Framing implies, among other things, the selection of *what* is legitimate to communicate as well as *who* is legitimated in choosing the *what*. In the case of a strong framing, the control on *what* (the content of communication) relies mainly on the transmitter (for instance the preschool teacher). A weak framing, on the other hand, implies that the control on *what* seems to be held by the acquirer (for instance the child or the learner).

Bernstein (1999) also introduced the concepts of horizontal and vertical discourse. According to Bernstein, a horizontal discourse gives rise to forms of knowledge that are context dependent, tacit and non-hierarchical. Furthermore, the kind of knowledge that circulates in the horizontal discourse is “embedded in on-going practices, usually with strong affective loading, and directed towards specific, immediate goals, highly relevant to the acquirer in the context of his/her life” (Bernstein, 1999, p. 161). A vertical discourse knowledge is instead both hierarchical, organised and explicit. It can be also described as an abstract form of knowledge whose meanings can be integrated and re-contextualised. Applied to the preschool context, the horizontal discourse is visible in the everyday practice of preschool and is expressed through a focus on learning different competencies that are valued in the context. The vertical discourse, on the other hand, can be linked to content knowledge as expressed in the curriculum goals. Re-contextualisation of the content can be related to teaching responsibility, where the content should be presented in meaningful and accessible ways based on the knowledge of the actual child/children (e.g. Eriksson, 2014).

The tensions between a horizontal and a vertical discourse can also be understood as a struggle between different ways of understanding what it means to be a professional in the context of early childhood (Arndt et al., 2018; Urban, 2008). The complexity of everyday life in preschools calls for a relational approach to both children and their families which is not quite reducible to more linear approaches with focus on outcomes (Urban, 2008). Furthermore, a horizontal discourse emphasises loyalty and democratic values such as equality, while a vertical discourse challenges the traditional organisation

of preschools (Eriksson, 2014; Kuisma & Sandberg, 2011). Nevertheless, challenging the horizontal discourse seems to be essential if preschool teachers have to exert leadership based on both professional knowledge and specific competencies (Eriksson et al., 2018).

Method

The study has been designed as a case study (Heck, 2006; Merriam, 1998). A case study design is suitable when trying to understand phenomena as comprised in an actual setting (Heck, 2006). This study focuses on the meaning of responsibility for teaching as it emerges in the specific setting. In the following section I will describe the context in which the study was conducted. Furthermore, I will account for the sources of data production, the analytical approach and the ethical considerations.

Context

The Swedish preschool is a voluntary school for children aged one to five. Since 1998 it has a national curriculum (Swedish National Agency for Education, 1998). The curriculum is based on a holistic view which encompasses both care and education, with goals to strive for and not on goals to achieve, as in the case of compulsory school. It was revised in 2010 and 2016 with a stronger emphasis on learning areas such as science, language and mathematics (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2016). In 2018 the curriculum was revised again and preschool teachers' responsibility for teaching was increased (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2018).

The participants and the context of the study

A group of preschool teachers from two different preschools participate in the study. Both preschools were driven by the municipality and were committed to a pedagogical vision summarised in pedagogical guidelines from the municipality.

At the time when the study was conducted, the preschool principle (which was the same for both the preschools) arranged for the preschool teachers to join in common collegial meetings. The main goal of these collegial meetings was articulated by the principal as strengthening the role of preschool teachers as responsible pedagogical leaders for teaching in preschool. Furthermore, preschool teachers were required to follow up the pedagogical commitments expressed in the pedagogical guidelines, the child convention and the national curriculum. The goals for the collegial meetings were communicated both orally and through a written document by the principal.

In these meetings five licensed preschool teachers, a pre-service preschool teacher who was already working at one of the preschools, and an unlicensed preschool teacher participated. In addition, some of the meetings were attended by two pedagogical

mentors (one pedagoga and one atelierista). The preschool principal participated in three meetings. All the meetings took place at the same site. The participants' attendance in those meetings varied to some extent with an average of five participants per meeting (see Table 1).

Data gathering

The empirical data consist of recordings of 17 weekly collegial meetings held during the autumn of 2019. The collegial meetings were recorded with a digital dictaphone. Approximately 16 hours were recorded (see Table 1).

During the collegial meetings the participants discussed their own practices, often referring to the pedagogical guidelines from the municipality as a source of understanding. The national curriculum was also referred to, although used to a lesser extent for discussion. Furthermore, they discussed a podcast¹ where a Swedish researcher discussed teaching in preschool and a short video with another Swedish researcher discussing the relationship between play and teaching.

I attended the collegial meetings as a non-participant observer (Kawulich, 2005). Consequently, I did not influence the content of the preschool teachers' discussions during these collegial meetings. Instead it was the preschool teachers in this study who discussed the issues important to them and their practice as "pedagogical leaders for teaching in preschool", as the preschool principal expressed it. Following this group of preschool teachers offered an opportunity to gain insight into how responsibility for teaching can be enacted in local practice.

The recordings were listened to both during transcription and after. A basic transcription that could account for the content of the dialogues during these meetings was used (e.g. Nikander, 2008). Gibson (2010) uses unfocused transcription as a label for an approach where the researcher is primarily interested in what has been said rather than how it has been said. Less attention is thus given to other features of the talk as such. The amount of transcribed text was approximately 300 pages.

¹ A podcast (or pod) stands for digital audio that can be downloaded and subscribed to. Podcasts often explore a theme or a topic through several episodes.

Table 1 Timetable and participants

<i>TIMETABLE</i>	<i>DURATION</i>	<i>PARTICIPANTS</i>
Meeting 1	55:37	5 licensed preschool teachers, 1 unlicensed preschool teacher 1 pre-service preschool teacher
Meeting 2	51:35	4 licensed preschool teachers, 1 unlicensed preschool teacher 1 pre-service preschool teacher
Meeting 3	55:53	4 licensed preschool teachers, 1 pre-service preschool teacher, 1 pedagogical mentor
Meeting 4	54:02	1 preschool principle, 3 licensed preschool teachers
Meeting 5	60:52	3 licensed preschool teachers, 1 unlicensed preschool teacher, 1 pre-service preschool teacher
Meeting 6	55:11	2 licensed preschool teachers, 1 pre-service preschool teacher, 1 unlicensed preschool teacher, 1 pedagogical mentor
Meeting 7	46:32	4 licensed preschool teachers, 1 pre-service preschool teacher
Meeting 8	51:16	3 licensed preschool teachers, 1 pre-service preschool teacher, 1 unlicensed preschool teacher, 1 pedagogical mentor
Meeting 9	55:46	5 licensed preschool teachers, 1 pre-service preschool teacher
Meeting 10	48:48	1 preschool principle, 4 licensed preschool teachers, 1 pre-service preschool teacher
Meeting 11	50:19	3 licensed preschool teachers, 1 unlicensed preschool teacher, 1 pedagogical mentor
Meeting 12	53:05	4 licensed preschool teachers, 1 unlicensed preschool teacher
Meeting 13	54:14	3 licensed preschool teachers, 1 pedagogical mentor
Meeting 14	56:30	1 preschool principle, 4 licensed preschool teachers
Meeting 15	55:11	4 licensed preschool teachers, 1 pedagogical mentor
Meeting 16	57:00	5 licensed preschool teachers, 1 unlicensed preschool teacher
Meeting 17	58:39	4 licensed preschool teachers, 1 pedagogical mentor
17 meetings	Approximately 16 hrs and 18 min.	

Ethical considerations

Initially the aim of the study was presented orally during a meeting attended by the preschool principals of one large municipality in Sweden. Written information was also distributed. Afterwards, preschool teachers willing to participate in this study contacted

me. Due to the focus on staff meetings as a site for construction of the meaning of responsibility for teaching, it was a requirement for those interested in participation to attend such meetings on a regular basis. Three teams contacted me and were informed at their workplace. During those occasions written information was distributed. One team withdrew their interest while the other two teams maintained it. Afterwards, a letter of consent was distributed. It was clearly stated for which purpose the data were going to be collected, how they were going to be collected and how the integrity of the participants was going to be protected. Furthermore, the participants' right to withdraw their participation in the study at any moment was communicated. Consent was collected from all the participants, which included a preschool principal and two pedagogical mentors, although the focus remained on the preschool teachers. The study follows the Swedish Research Council's ethical guidelines (2017). Confidentiality had been provided through anonymisation of the participants' identity both in the transcripts and in the presentation of the results. All the names are fictitious.

Ethical dilemma

During the study I was confronted by an ethical dilemma. I have been working for many years as a preschool teacher. A majority of the participants who expressed their willingness to participate had been my colleagues back in the day when I worked as a preschool teacher. Methodological and ethical issues arose from being close to the participants (Flodén, 2019). I thoroughly discussed the matter with senior colleagues at my department and I came to the decision to carry on the study: the participation was voluntary, and I was very clear that consent could be withdrawn at any time. I was transparent with the aim of the study. Moreover, I explained that I could not guarantee anonymity although always striving for confidentiality. Additionally, my personal experience and preconceptions could cause bias. To reduce the potential bias I used a log as a means of self-reflection and control during the data collection (Marshall, 2006). During the analytical process I read the transcripts several times and actively looked for data that could contradict previous interpretations.

At the heart of every research project lies the ethical question of benefits and risks for the participants. Potential risks such as exposure or punishment from a higher level in the organisation were considered minimal. In terms of effort, the study did not require any extra time from the participants because the meetings were scheduled as a part of their work. On the other hand, benefits, such as the possibility to discuss the results, were considered as being stronger. As Flodén (2019) points out, it can be more likely that the knowledge that is produced can stay within the organisation and be used by the participants as a positive side of the understanding between the researcher and the participants.

Analytical procedure

The transcriptions were first read several times each. During the analysis I highlighted quotations that could represent what was discussed by the preschool teachers during the collegial meetings. These quotations are parts of larger piece of dialogues where the topics were evolved by the participants' contributions. However, due to the limits and the purpose of this article, it is not possible to show a larger part of the dialogues.

As Gibson (2010) describes, empirical codes are developed during the process of making sense of the data. What has been coded holds relevance for the research question. During the coding process I used the following approach, apart from the relevance for the research question: dimensions that emerge often, dimensions that are agreed upon and dimensions that express concerns or disagreement (Gibson, 2010) (see Figure 1). Parts of the dialogues at the collegial meetings that were excluded from the analysis fall outside the scope of the research question. For instance, I excluded discussions about parental meetings, practical issues and professional development.

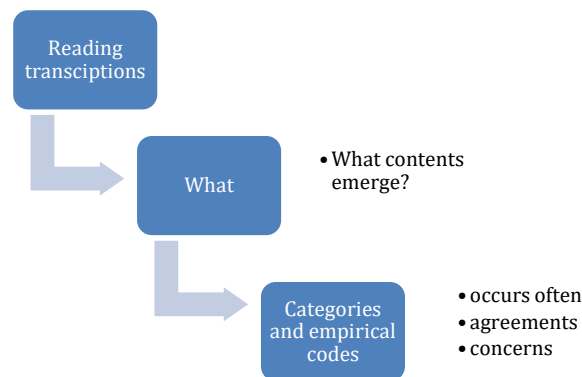


Figure 1 The analytical process

During the first step of the analysis, I searched for how preschool teachers' *responsibility for leading the teaching process* was discussed during the preschool teachers' conversations. This strategy was used as a means of data reduction. Passages that were of interest were highlighted and notes were made in the margins.

In the next step I also highlighted parts where the preschool teachers discussed content areas for the *responsibility for leading preschool as a pedagogical practice*, as different challenges seem to arise, for example the environment and the general approach towards children. I chose to include these content areas in the analysis because the preschool teachers' discussions tended to focus on these areas. This second step in the analysis showed what the preschool teachers discussed when they were supposed to strengthen their roles as the ones responsible for teaching in preschool. These content areas were

included in the analytical process as an expression of responsibility for leading the preschool as a pedagogical practice, rather than a more specific responsibility for teaching.

Finally, the results derived through the two steps of the analysis were placed on a larger theoretical frame, by discussing them through Bernstein's theory of pedagogy (2000).

Trustworthiness and authenticity

Quotations are used to increase the trustworthiness of the study by showing how the findings are supported by data. Furthermore, the participants have been given the opportunity to discuss the results with the researcher, providing the participants' validation through member checking (Creswell, 2012). Following Schwandt et al. (2007), I have strived to strengthen the authenticity of the study through communication of the findings as a way of increasing awareness of the participants (including the researcher) by discussing both the complexity and potential consequences of different meanings of responsibility for teaching. An increased and nuanced knowledge could be useful for the participants as a way of addressing challenges (catalytic and tactical authenticity) as described in Schwandt et al. (2007).

Results

The results will be presented as summarised in the table 2 below. As can be seen, responsibility was discussed both as *a specific responsibility for teaching*, where preschool teachers discussed what it meant to them, and as *responsibility for leading preschool as a pedagogical practice*, where different but interrelated contents were brought into the discussion.

Table 2 Preschool teachers' expressed contents of responsibility

<i>RESPONSIBILITY FOR TEACHING</i>	<i>RESPONSIBILITY FOR LEADING PRESCHOOL AS A PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICE</i>
Resources	Challenges
<i>The team</i>	<i>The team</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We do this together - It's not just us - We are a team - It doesn't matter if you are a childminder or a preschool teacher - Everybody is responsible to contribute 	<i>Leadership</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It is difficult for preschool teachers to say "we do like this" - Should my words be more important than others'? - We depend on each other - In the past everyone took responsibility - We must do it together because there are few preschool teachers - When is it my responsibility to intervene?
Challenges	<i>The general approach</i>
<i>Pressure</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Each one should be responsible when meeting children - We have different views of what is better or worse for the children
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Now we have to count stones instead of playing - You feel pushed to introduce subjects 	<i>The importance of pedagogical environment</i>
<i>Support</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - everyone has a personal responsibility for it - there is low engagement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pedagogical guidelines say nothing - We just plan for activities - We discuss practical things mostly - Little time to discuss what teaching is for us 	

Preschool teachers' responsibility for teaching

The results indicate that preschool teachers discuss teaching as their responsibility. Although responsibility for teaching is recognised as specific to preschool teachers, the importance of the whole work team is underlined. Responsibility for teaching is thus mainly discussed as something which is possible to realise in the context of the work team. Preschool teachers in this study thus seem to be prone to retain a collective responsibility, and thus a shared leadership, as Lisa expresses below:

Yes, but I mean together we're a work team but that we preschool teachers have more responsibility. I mean teaching responsibility but together we do that job together - it's not just us preschool teachers.

Preschool teachers' responsibility for teaching is also expressed in a more pragmatic manner, such as ensuring that things get done. Tina says:

It doesn't matter if you are a childminder or a preschool teacher. The main thing is that the one that is active can inspire the children and then maybe we preschool teachers have an additional responsibility in ensuring that things get done.

When preschool teachers discuss responsibility for teaching as their responsibility, without connecting teaching explicitly to the work team, they describe two main challenges. One challenge that is discussed several times is that of responsibility for leading teaching perceived as a form of pressure. One of the preschool teachers, Maya, expresses how the responsibility for leading teaching is felt as a requirement to introduce some form of content causing her to feel stressed. Teaching is also described as difficult to harmonise with children's own activities:

Oh, but you feel that it can (.) you can be a bit stressed sometimes and sort of think that now I've got to go in and teach, we've got to count the stones here instead of them carrying on with their play where the magic... I think that oh but I'm not doing anything here. If I don't go in here and start counting stones with them, mathematics. (The preschool principal asks if she has been feeling like that): no but I've felt a bit (.) now with this increased teaching responsibility, (that)perhaps I must see to them sort of instead of just sort of relaxing and then seeing if the children (invite you in).

Similarly, Mary describes how introducing content can be at odds with children's own activities if the preschool teacher, rather than following children's leads, tries to introduce content:

And then you could sort of see what happened when you crossed this boundary so that you didn't follow what the children were doing but you tried to add something else. That it er sort of, that the children got completely confused then and it got outside the context. For then you felt a bit of pressure introducing this, the subjects if you say, but that it wasn't then on the children's er terms.

Low support on how responsibility for teaching should be understood is also brought to discussion. For instance, in relation to the pedagogical guidelines, as Carole expresses:

And then I also thought about this thing with teaching. I mean the preschool teacher's responsibility (.) and it says—oh there are bits where it is the preschool teacher's responsibility. It says nothing about this pedagogical orientation for XX town. It says nothing, it says preschool teachers and other staff oh something like this. But it says nothing about the preschool teacher's responsibility there and then what responsibility you have.

What kind of responsibility preschool teachers have is discussed in broader terms when it comes to the pedagogical practice. It is here that some tensions emerge.

Preschool teachers' responsibility for leading preschool as a pedagogical practice

Preschool teachers in this study discuss responsibility more often as connected to the whole pedagogical practice. Preschool teachers do have the overall responsibility for leading preschool as a pedagogical practice to be carried out in accordance with the preschool curriculum's expressed goals, values and norms. The importance of the work team is stressed here as well. But while the work team was discussed as a positive resource in relation to teaching, some challenges are put forward. The general approach towards children and the extent of preschool teachers' responsibility and leadership are discussed as the main challenges together with an understanding for the educational task encompassing the pedagogical environment.

In fact, through their conversations, preschool teachers point at a common general approach as not completely shared. A general sensitive approach seems to be at the core of responsibility for the pedagogical practice. Responsibility is conceived here as a responsibility that each one has towards the children, regardless of their role. Jane says:

But (...) in the actual situations with children (...) the children encounter just an adult. They do not encounter a childminder or a preschool teacher or something like that. There it is each and everyone responsible for how I approach the child.

Although everyone should be responsible, challenges seem to arise when a sensitive general approach is not being shared by everyone in the work team. For instance, Carole discusses to which extent preschool teachers should be responsible for intervening:

What do we have as a responsibility to intervene in some situation and (...) I think that one is a part of the team (...). Maybe you react to certain things (...). And when should I intervene specifically as a preschool teacher? (...). Because I believe it's the same here, it's about what we should do here with the children and what we shouldn't do (...). What is for (...) when should one understand this by herself (...) that this is not suitable to do or it is suitable?

Despite the fact that Mary expresses that the challenges that arise with preschool teachers clearly depend on the whole work team, it can be controversial to exercise some form of leadership:

But then it is difficult as a preschool teacher. Also, should my word count more than someone else's? (...) In a team there can be grumpy faces (...). Not good, we depend on having a good working climate.

Moreover, the pedagogical environment is also considered as being at the core of the educational task. It is expected to be carefully designed and appealing to children. When Tina talks about responsibility she connects responsibility to the awareness of the importance of the pedagogical environment. When the awareness is not shared by everyone it may cause challenges:

But then I also think it is about responsibility like when I go with the children (xx) I mean when I quit work at half past five Tuesday Wednesday Thursday then I see it as my responsibility to look after I mean if I am the last one that is leaving it is my responsibility then to be sure that those who come on Friday morning or Tuesday morning (.) the environment has to be fresh and nice it has to be inviting you to come in you don't have to come in to a chaos.

A low degree of understanding of the importance of the pedagogical environment and of the child at the centre of preschool pedagogy are then often mentioned as obstacles for creating a shared common approach.

Discussion and implications

The purpose of this study was to increase the knowledge of how responsibility for teaching can be understood in a preschool context. More specifically, it was to shed a light on the challenges connected to preschool teachers' responsibility for teaching expressed during collegial meetings.

The specific responsibility for teaching was a less prominent topic of discussion compared with the responsibility for leading preschool as a pedagogical practice. The main challenge preschool teachers seem to address is a lack of common understanding of the educational mission in the team as a whole. Although maintaining that responsibility should be shared among the team members, they express concerns that not everyone in the team shares a common understanding as a starting point. When the preschool teachers in this group address tensions in the team, they do so from the logic of a horizontal discourse rather than a vertical discourse. One possible interpretation is that preschool teachers cannot fully establish a leadership based on specific professional knowledge. In fact, as some of them seem to clearly express, their dependency on the work team can make it difficult. Furthermore, as Bernstein points out (2000), it is somehow typical for practices with low framing and classification to also have a low degree of specialisation. Rather than in a specialised knowledge, the challenges that emerge, based on the preschool teachers' accounts, operate through the logic of a horizontal discourse. The challenges emerge in relation to the responsibility for leading preschool as a pedagogical practice and seem to be located in different understandings of the pedagogical task. Preschool teachers describe a good pedagogical practice as being based on a sensitive general approach towards children. Furthermore, they highlight the importance of the pedagogical environment.

What their specific responsibility for teaching implies in the context of working in a team is not clearly stated. They seem to rather retain a shared responsibility, thus a shared leadership, where the work team is seen as a positive resource. Thus, responsibility for teaching seems to be perceived as formal, as preschool teachers have been appointed for being responsible in the preschool curriculum, but at same time is possible to realise in the context of a shared responsibility in the work team. Nevertheless, some hesitation is voiced in relation to the extent of support given when it comes to clarifying preschool teachers' specific responsibility for teaching in preschool.

Furthermore, within a tradition of low classification and framing, preschool teachers are prone to describe their role as facilitators while children are supposed to guide and invite the adults. On the other hand, when responsibility for teaching was discussed in relation to a potential content that might be introduced, the participants expressed concerns as to whether such practice can be considered legitimated. In doing so the preschool teachers in this study point to classification, intended as subjects or a predeterminate content, as being difficult to harmonise with children's own plans as expressed for instance in play. The participants described a feeling of pressure to introduce content and describe how the children themselves became confused by the preschool teachers' efforts.

However, to inspire children is considered important, especially through a careful design of the pedagogical environment. The low framing within the practice is then visible through a pedagogical approach based on child-centredness. Thus it can be difficult to establish a specific responsibility for teaching, at least in relation to a specific content knowledge. This may explain why a shared responsibility for leading the preschool as a pedagogical practice is more often expressed instead. It can be reasonable to point to the organisational challenges in Swedish preschool, where the number of workers without any specific pedagogical education has increased over the past few years (Tallberg Broman & Persson, 2019; Vallberg Roth & Tallberg Broman, 2018), leading to the commitment to a shared responsibility.

Nevertheless, many challenges are addressed here, shedding a light on the difficulties that preschool teachers in this study perceive in relation to responsibility for leading the preschool as a pedagogical practice, with the responsibility for teaching as a part of it. Although having a clear mandate to exercise leadership, at least on the policy level, the preschool teachers in this study often describe how they depend on the work team. They describe it as difficult to challenge the existing order. Thus, the horizontal discourse in preschool organisation (Eriksson, 2014; Eriksson et al., 2018) is not easy to challenge, given the organisational shortcomings.

However, support for using and implementing preschool teachers' educational responsibility and leadership seems to be given by the preschool principal, for instance by creating forums for discussion for preschool teachers. This seems to support Eriksson et al. (2018) findings, indicating a movement towards a more hierarchical discourse. On the other hand, the need of further support to establish a more specific responsibility seems to be voiced when the preschool teachers are interpreting the council's pedagogical guidelines.

As Jonsson et al. (2017) study indicates, the concept of teaching is somehow perceived as demanding. Furthermore, some of the findings seem to imply that play and the curriculum orientation are perceived as dichotomies, and thus the role of the preschool teacher is conceived as mainly supporting children's play. Other studies (Björklund & Palmér, 2019; Pramling et al., 2019) show that an integration between play and teaching is both possible and desirable.

Furthermore, similar to Vallberg Roth (2018), the findings in this study point to teaching having a vague and diffuse meaning. Moreover, it is possible to interpret the construction of *responsibility for teaching* as being connected to a wide pedagogical responsibility in line with what Hildén et al. (2018) discuss: an ambition to retain what appears to be perceived as characteristic of preschool pedagogy. In this study, what appears to be peculiar to preschool pedagogy has been described as a strong child-centredness with low framing and classification. As Cutter-Mackenzie (2014) discusses, there are underlying assumptions associated with child-centredness, such as children leading and constructing their own knowledge. The concept of teaching challenges these assumptions because it requires preschool teachers to embrace a more prominent role regarding children's learning.

The preschool teachers in this study express both feeling uncertain and pressured when trying to embrace a more prominent role. Concerns for schoolification, when teaching in preschool could resemble a more instructional practice, are not explicitly stated but are rather implicit, as the preschool teachers reflect on the preschool as a pedagogical practice of which teaching as a goal-oriented process is supposed to be a part. As Eidevald and Engdahl (2018) note, a possible outcome of a more knowledge-oriented preschool could lead to a weakening of the peculiar nature of preschool pedagogy.

As expressed by some of the participants, there is a need for more explicit guidance on how responsibility for teaching should be enacted. When guidance is missing it can be more difficult for preschool teachers to establish both their specific responsibility as well as their leadership associated with this. For instance, at a local level it seems that the councils' pedagogical guidelines are not fully designed to give this support.

Thus, the findings shed a light on some of the challenges that emerge when a group of preschool teachers try to understand during collegial meetings what responsibility for teaching could mean in their practice. These challenges are entangled at one level with the logic of the pedagogical practice. On another level they are entangled with the organisational context at the local level, where different understandings of the educational mission and of the pedagogical values that are at the core of it are discussed as a main challenge. As Vallberg Roth and Tallberg Broman (2018) point out, both the traditional organisation of the Swedish preschool and the shortage of licensed preschool teachers can pose severe challenges to the ambitions that are expressed in the national curriculum.

The opportunity to discuss pedagogical practice on regular basis could be regarded as a first step to support the preschool teachers' new role and their understanding of responsibility for teaching. Nevertheless, the results of this study point to the need to enhance those meetings with a stronger focus on what teaching can be as well as how to harmonise the practice of teaching with a child's perspective. To be able to do that, preschool teachers may need support to challenge the assumptions of child-centredness in order to establish teaching as appropriate to their practice, as shown in other studies (Hatch, 2010; McLaughlin et al., 2016). Without proper support, teaching can be a missed opportunity.

Limitations and future research

The findings of this study are restricted to a few participants. Furthermore, the study has been conducted during a limited period of time. Thus, the produced data and the subsequent results cannot be generalised to other contexts. However, a generalisation by analogies is possible (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Another limitation is that the participants in this study have been working together for a longer period (varying from between a few months and some years), and thus it can be expected that they have been building common views and beliefs concerning their daily practices that can be hard to question within the group. Future research could then be conducted by using other strategies for recruiting participants as well as using other methodologies.

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