

# Presentation of Research on School-Age Educare in Sweden

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**Abstract:** In this article a background to the growing need of establishing school-age educare as a field of research in Sweden is presented. Firstly a short review of the history of the school-age educare is given, followed by a description of how the activity is organized today. Some examples of studies produced within this field are presented. Both accomplished studies and ongoing research are given account for. The article concludes with actions suggested for covering existing gaps of research.

**Keywords:** School-age educare, leisure-time centres, extended education, children's perspectives, qualitative research

## 1 Introduction

In this article we are going to present examples of research directed to school-age educare in Sweden. The definition of school-age educare comprises and emphasises that both education and care are given in this activity directed towards children in the early school-age and, in Sweden, are placed in so called leisure-time centres. Other international denominations for kindred activities are 'extended education', 'whole-day school' and 'all-day school'. At first it is important to state that school-age educare is a well-established educational activity in Sweden, reaching back as far as the late 19th century. Today, it is a well-developed service, spread all over the country. Nearly all Swedish children between six to eight years of age attend leisure time centres where educare is provided. Although, research directed towards school-age educare is to be considered as scarce.

Before describing the research towards school-aged educare we want to give a short overview of how the leisure-time centre has developed and changed over the years, give some facts about the leisure-time centres, as well as mention some of the keystones of importance for establishing school-age educare as a field of research.

## 2 The History of the Leisure-Time Centre

The activity in so called 'work cottages' are the roots of the leisure-time centres of today. In her thesis Malin Rohlin (2001) describes how conceptions concerning the leisure-time centre and its predecessors have changed during different periods of time. She asserts that these conceptions have been accompanied by different power conditions that act and control in the name of children's free time. When she describes these leading conceptions she illustrates them as (1) a conception of work (2) a conception of recreation and (3) a conception of education.

Rohlin claims that the conception of work was the dominating idea from the end of the 19th century to the 1930s and was performed in the activity in work cottages. The work cottages were institutions that only directed their activities to the poorest children (cf. Johansson 1984; Karlsson 1998; Olsson 1999; Rohlin 1996). The founders of these institutions were philanthropic associations that strived for a moral improvement of the poor and the work cottage was seen as a tool in this ambition. From a philanthropic point of view the poor were not in need of charity, if anything they were in need of education and a proper upbringing. Only through education could the children be adjusted to the norms of the society; quit begging, stealing and stop performing all kind of mischief in the streets. Lars Karlsson (1998) describes the activities in the early 20th century work cottages as 'activity education'. The activities of the work cottages were, among other things, based on different kinds of handicraft, woodwork and textile craft. The staff consisted of different craftsmen who taught their craft, teachers who wanted to earn money on the side and young and rich women who wanted to give support to the poor. Work was one of the cornerstones in the activities and the children were taught that work was profitable. The children were rewarded with food and received a meal for the work they had performed. Through the work the children carried out they also got the chance to learn a craft they could support themselves with in the future. Another point of departure for emphasizing handicraft in work cottages was a criticism of the stress of theory in school. The philanthropic philosophy was, in that way, not entirely based on work as a moral value. There was also an educational idea, taking the view that manual labor should be more appreciated (Rohlin 2001).

The work cottage, however, became obsolete over time since the Swedish society developed and poverty decreased. These institutions also became questionable for political reasons and a new concept appeared that indicated that children should not work with the exception of their school related work. The conception of work was in that way followed by the conception of recreation. This conception was guiding the idea of younger schoolchildren's leisure at the afternoon centre<sup>1</sup> between the 1930s to the 1960s. This meant that the society was remodelled and changed social practices that offered younger schoolchildren the opportunity to take part in the afternoon centre activity, instead. Activities in the afternoon centre were very different compared to the activities in the work cottage (Rohlin 2001). The activities in the afternoon centre were often seen as a continuation of the activities in the day-care and were mostly based on child minding (Calander 1999; Hansen 1999). The notion of

1 Leisure-time centres were labelled afternoon centres during this period since the opening hours were circumscribed to afternoons. The name leisure-time centre was not common until the beginning of the 1960s when the opening hours also increased and included early mornings before school.

complementing theory in school with different kinds of manual work, as in the work cottage, was not present in the afternoon centre. Children's leisure should, from the point of view of the afternoon centre, be spent by doing homework, play, or recreate. This new organisation could be seen as a pre-schoolisation since the afternoon centres were mainly staffed by pre-school teachers (Rohlin 1996). This could also be seen as a stagnation since the education of pre-school teachers was not directed to schoolchildren and there was also uncertainty about the purpose of the afternoon centre (Rohlin 1996).

The notion that succeeded the conception of recreation started in the early 1960s and was a conception of education (Rohlin 2001). Rohlin asserts that the conception of recreation took place on a social arena while the conception of education initially took place in a socio-educational arena. Time, within the frames of the leisure-time centre, was now constructed in relation to school. Leisure-time centres were, from the 1960s on, not principally meant to deal with child minding. Instead leisure-time centres were supposed to arrange the activities as a support for social development. This should be done by mainly supporting the families but also by supporting the school.

A shorter education directed towards work in leisure-time centres started in the middle of the 1960s and it was also during this period the name of the profession "leisure-time pedagogue" was established. This education was later extended and became a university education in 1977. The education to leisure-time pedagogue had similarities with the education to pre-school teacher since these professions historically have had connections. Leisure-time centres were, in most cases, situated in the same buildings as day-care centres until the 1980s but nowadays the leisure-time centres are mostly located in schools.

### *Recognition of the Value of the Activity in the Leisure-Time Centre*

In 1974 a national committee was appointed with the assignment of changing the inner work of the school. The committee criticized the school for having a strong theoretical bias and the committee suggested to extend the school day and set up both practical and aesthetical activities in the school for all children, not only for the children enrolled in the leisure-time centres (SOU 1974, p. 53). And the committee suggested that leisure-time pedagogues should lead these activities. The expectations were, accordingly, that the way of performing educational activity in leisure-time centres could contribute to resolve the problems in the schools. This can be seen as a strong recognition to the activity in the leisure-time centre. The suggestions for the committee were sanctioned and the new whole-day school was born.

## 3 Structure of the Leisure-Time Centre of Today

There are 4,316 leisure-time centres in Sweden (The Swedish National Agency 2013). 411,255 children between 6–13 years old are enrolled in the school-age educare in these activities. As there are, in all, 431,922 children aged 6–9 years living in Sweden (SCB 2013), this means that about 82.3% of the children this age attend

leisure-time centres. 18% of the children aged 10–12 are enrolled in leisure-time centres.

When it comes to the personnel working with school-age educare-activity there are 33,023 persons employed in leisure-time centres. Most of them are educated leisure-time pedagogues, but due to the shortage of educated leisure-time pedagogues there are also personnel who have backgrounds as preschool-teachers, primary or secondary teachers, recreation leaders and also a few persons working in the leisure-time centres without university education. The positions are regulated in employment agreements and there are no volunteers partaking in the Swedish leisure-time centres.

The amount of children per pedagogue has increased during the last 30 years. In 2013 an average group of children in leisure-time centre consisted of 40.4 children. At the beginning of the 1980s the average group consisted of 18 children. Most of this increase occurred during the 1990s. But the increase has continued into the twenty-first century and in the last ten years the groups have increased by one child per year.

2013 an average of 20.3 children was allotted on a full-time equivalent in leisure-time centres (one full-time equivalents have been adopted to work 40 hours/week). That is almost three times as many as in 1980 when the number was 7.4 children/personnel. The personnel take turns, working from early morning until late afternoon since the centres are mostly opened from 6.30 in the morning until 18.30 in the evening. Three meals a day are served.

To sum up, at the same time as the amount of children per leisure-time centre has increased the number of leisure-time centres and the number of leisure-time pedagogues has not increased, correspondingly.

From this presentation of facts about the leisure-time centre we will move to what is needed to establish school-age educare as a scientific field of research.

#### 4      Keystones for Establishing School-Age Educare as a Scientific Field of Research

There are both several – already existing ones but also non-existent – foundations needed for establishing school-age educare as a field of research. Among the existing constituents the emergence of the modern leisure-time centres, the well educated professionals working in leisure-time centres, as well as the university based education to become a leisure-time pedagogue (today called teachers towards work in leisure-time centres) could be mentioned as very important. Further, the close connection between practice and modern educational theories as well as the emergence of modern and updated policy documents, are also important cornerstones for the urgent work of establishing school-age educare as a scientific field of research. There is also a considerably high amount of scholars interested in engaging in this field, but prerequisites in the shape of grants are lacking. Neither does higher education, such as a specific master education or a graduate education directed towards this field, exist.

Before describing the research produced towards this area we will present the above mentioned keystones more carefully.

### *Leisure-Time Centre as a Specific Practice*

In early 1990 the Swedish professor Ingrid Carlgren (1999), drawing on theories launching a new way of understanding learning (Lave 1993; Wertsch 1998), claimed that the school should be viewed as a specific practice, working on certain demands, with specific aims and goals. Using the same theoretical starting points the leisure-time centre could, accordingly, be viewed as a specific practice governed by its own demands, aims, traditions, and goals (Klerfelt 1999; 2007).

### *The Activity in Leisure-Time Centres*

Modern educational theories have created a growing interest in the processes of meaning making, care, and leisure that are supposed to happen in leisure-time centres. Through the practical educational attitude elaborated during decades the activity is characterized by a child centred perspective, where interaction between the children and the leisure-time pedagogues, constitutes the foundation for the educational activity.

### *The Significance of Governance, Control, and Curriculum*

Leisure-time centres are regulated by the Education Act, just like the compulsory school and the preschool class. This new school law from 2010 and the common 'Curriculum for the compulsory school, preschool class and the leisure-time centre' (The National Agency for Education) from 2011 constitute important policy documents. Another important policy document is the 'General guidelines and comments for quality in leisure-time centres' (The National Agency for Education) from 2007. These guidelines are explicitly directed towards school-age educare and function as guidelines for municipalities and leisure-time pedagogues on how to perform and develop the activity.

### *University-Based Teacher Education*

The importance of a well developed and specific teacher education cannot be undervalued. The first education to become a leisure-time pedagogue was set up in 1964. 1977 the education was further elaborated and moved into universities. The contemporary education could be considered to be of high quality, resting on both traditions and scientific ground.

During the last decades the teacher education has been exposed to several reorganizations. The latest reorganization took place two years ago and in the autumn of 2011 a new teacher education saw the light. The teacher education of today is now formed as one school for becoming a preschool teacher; three closely interrelated directions to be trained as a teacher towards the early years in school, which includes

one direction towards preschool class up to grade 3, one towards grades 4 to 6, and one towards work in leisure-time centres. Then, there are other schools for educating teachers towards grades 7 to 9, upper secondary school and adult education. This also means that the profession has changed title from 'leisure-time pedagogue' to 'teacher towards work in leisure-time centres'. Besides leading the activity in the leisure-time centre the 'teacher towards work in leisure-time centres' is trained for working as a teacher in school for pupils in grade 4–6, in one of the practical/aesthetic subjects and as a home-economics teacher.

## 5 Research

In the following section research concerning school-age educare will be presented. Examples of theoretical approaches, methods and results will be described.

### *Theoretical and Methodological Approaches Applied*

Researchers devoting themselves to explore questions concerning school-age educare use different kinds of theoretical starting points depending on different purposes and different academic traditions (Klerfelt 2002). However, since many studies are directed towards constructing knowledge with the aim of understanding interaction between the participants in the activity mostly theoretical approaches emanating from socio-constructionistic traditions are employed. When it comes to methodological approaches research accomplished towards school-age educare is mainly characterized by qualitative method. However, a considerable amount of information in quantitative terms is also available. The Swedish National Agency for Education is frequently undertaking evaluations of the activity, mainly by measuring the quality. Each year the National Agency publishes a compilation of descriptive data on pre-school activities, school-age educare, schools and adult education.

### *Different Ways of Presenting Research*

Results from research presented concerning the leisure-time centre can roughly be divided into three kinds of publications: doctoral theses, journal articles and, finally, surveys and evaluations. The following presentation of research will not cover all studies that have been accomplished in this area but try to give examples of knowledge produced to illustrate an overall picture of content and knowledge in this field. Some examples of recent research presented in edited volumes will also be given.

### *Research Themes*

If leisure-time centres are specific educational practices, different from other educational practices, they should have special potentials for adding unique possibilities for the children. The themes in this presentation are of particular interest when estab-



lishing well founded arguments for discussing school-age educare in terms of educational quality and potentials for extended education. They are also interrelated and mutually dependent on each other. Awareness concerning the content in the leisure-time centre is fundamental to get knowledge of what kind of activities the children benefit from when struggling with their meaning making processes. As well as the teacher education making use of the research results, it also asks for new theoretically based knowing and in that way the teacher education demands of the researchers to produce knowledge. The professionals in leisure-time centres are interested in new findings as inspiration for discussing and elaborating their way of working, both for the sake of the children and when supervising students and young colleagues. The emerging collaborations between researchers from different countries contribute in different ways of viewing school-age educare and constitute a breeding ground for comparisons, with possibilities to distribute and share new knowledge.

But the following presentation also gives account for information from evaluations and studies presented in books. Research directed at the leisure-time centres in Sweden seldom aims for measuring quality. This assignment is designated as a public function and evaluations are commissioned yearly by the National Agency. Also, edited volumes cover an important function for making results accessible for, among others, policy-makers, teacher education students and professionals.

The research to be presented will be grouped according to three themes: *content and activities in the everyday practice of the leisure-time centre*, *teachers' professionalism*, constructions of knowledge in teacher education towards school-age educare, and *comparative research*.

### *Content and Activities in the Everyday Practice of the Leisure-Time Centre*

In the early 80's questions about values and democracy were central and this is also reflected in the research (Klerfelt 2002). A notion taken for granted is that if the leisure-time centres accomplish educational activity of high quality this activity should promote equality between the children. The expectations are that enrolment in the leisure-time centre can give children general knowledge that can minimize their prejudices and support their social competences. Roland Svensson discusses questions about the function of the educational activities as reproduction of the society and how the public socialization of children and young people takes place in his thesis from 1981. Svensson asserts that children were omitted to public socialization due to education and expert knowledge. In this public socialization the state set the frameworks for right and wrong. Independent of social class all children were exposed for the same public socialization.

In several other early doctoral theses directed towards the leisure-time centre (Evaldsson 1993; Johansson 1984; Karlsudd 1999; Ursberg 1996) various aspects of the social practice in the leisure-time centre were studied. Johansson (1984) tries to elucidate the characteristics of the leisure-time centre and its work (p. 227). He is discussing the role of the leisure-time pedagogue and the content of the work in leisure-time centres and his study gives a contribution to the discussion of the importance of practical knowledge.

### Interaction Between Children and Leisure-Time Pedagogues

By observing children's play and communication Ann-Carita Evaldsson (1993) studies children's social order in the ordinary life in two leisure-time centres. By drawing on theoretical traditions in anthropology (ethnography of speaking and language socialization) and sociology (ethnomethodology and micro-sociology), she demonstrates that language, conduct and culture are interrelated. Situated activities such as play, disputes, teasing, secrets and control events are interpreted as they convey how talk and actions are organized and organize the social order at the respective centre. The interdependence between children's ways of acting and the way the staff deals with the children are discussed.

Ursberg (1996) studies the interplay between the leisure-time pedagogues and the children. The investigation has a qualitative inception where five leisure-time pedagogues are observed via video recordings. Characteristics appear in the main category "social order and group control" which have a dominating and controlling function for attitude and behaviour. Based on these characteristics, three interaction styles are derived. "Interaction style 1" is characterized by the social order's having an established structure, i.e. there are well-established routines for attendance, division into groups, ordering of priorities, and division of labours, which are consistently used. "Interaction style 2" is characterized by a social order with an open and flexible structure. One basic prerequisite is the adult's sensitivity to the children's interests, desires, and capabilities. The children participate on all the different levels of the planning and the teacher functions as a partner in discussions, a coordinator, and an organizer. "Interaction style 3" is characterized by a social order with a structure that is closed and controlled by the adult. Ursberg finds that the leisure-time pedagogue has a Platonic image of social order, and a detailed agenda for how routine situations will turn out, how norms and rules are to be observed, and how the contents and organization of activities are to be implemented.

Annika Löfdahl, Tomas Saar, and Maria Hjalmarsson also study the leisure-time centre activities that take place beyond the ordinary school day: during early mornings and late afternoons as well as school holidays. Their purpose is to explore which norms are created, manifested and displayed in the everyday practices of leisure-time centres. Further, they explore how the leisure-time centres are shaped, which borders are created in the interplay between different practices/actors and the leisure-time centres, how the leisure-time pedagogues 'market' the activities and how this is met by parents, politicians, and head teachers. Saar/Löfdahl/Hjalmarsson (2012) discuss how knowledge possibilities are created in the relation between the pedagogue's descriptions of the activities offered at the after-school centres – *what is this?* – and the children's curiosity to explore the activities – *what might this be?*

In a recent study Björn Haglund (manuscript) has conducted six weeks of fieldwork at a leisure-time centre in order to describe the activity as a social system that is both a medium for and a result of recursive social practices. He also analyzes power relations and prominent discourses that contribute to producing and reproducing the social system. By making the discourses visible the ongoing analysis gives opportunities to mitigate inequalities concerning power relations between children and leisure-time pedagogues.

Maud Ihrskog (2006) focuses on children's peer relations concerning constructions of identity, friendship and socialisation processes. She also emphasized the



formation of meaning and informal learning processes in these relations. Also Marianne Dahl (2011) is researching children's social life in the leisure-time centre. She focuses both on community practices as a social construction and children's alliance-building within and between the community practices that emerge. In addition, she studies gender aspects that are communicated and become visible in these community practices.

### Children's Perspectives

In recent years, educational research has paid attention to children's opportunities and rights to be heard. Pia Haudrup Christensen (2004) has coined this different way of conducted studies as the "methodological turn". Her pioneering work has inspired Anna Klerfelt and Björn Haglund (2011; 2014, manuscript) to accomplish a study with the aim of constructing knowledge about children's perspectives on the activity in their leisure-time centre. The analysis intends to compare how children and pedagogues talk about their mutually constructed activity with the purpose of revealing the prominent discourses in the studied leisure-time centres. Klerfelt and Haglund also have a methodological interest in elaborating a specific way of using walk-and-talk conversations with both children and pedagogues. The results are described through narratives that depict the children's discourses in their leisure-time activity. The emerging discourses show that children's perspectives are met in several respects but also that their perspectives are not always those that adults expect. The study also shows, however, that children's perspectives are, in some respects, ignored. Klerfelt and Haglund maintain that these results have a potential to contribute by helping to make children's voices heard as a tool to change the social practices in leisure-time centres.

Also Saar (forthcoming) is discussing the activities from the perspective of the children, and formulates the possibilities of a unique pedagogy for the leisure-time centre.

### Play and Cultural Meaning Making

Research focusing what children really do in their leisure-time centres is limited. Play is a cornerstone in the activity and Eva Kane is currently conducting an action research study about play in school-age educare workers practice. She focuses on how school-age childcare staff develops their skills to facilitate play as a team. Her research questions deal with how staff talks about play and how they believe that they support play individually and collectively, but also questions about what language is used and developed when focusing on play. She also puts questions about how staff support play in their daily interactions with the children and what processes support the development of skills for facilitating play (Kane/Ljusberg/Larsson 2013).

Klerfelt (2007) is interested in children's cultural meaning making. She explores the encounter between institution and media culture and how this encounter is shaped in the interaction between children and pedagogues in leisure-time centres. Her thesis focuses on the interactive processes that arise when children and pedagogues meet in the educational practice to create stories in words and pictures with digital technology. She continues to research and discusses the leisure-time centre as a cultural practice and shows how children use commonly shared symbols created

in their educare activity to build up metaphors in their digital stories (2004, 2006, 2012). The metaphors are discussed as expressions of discourse and as a way of creating prerequisites for making of meaning and identity. The stories spring from the children's everyday practice in the leisure-time centre and mirror their contemporary media culture.

### Children in Need of Special Support

In policy documents for childcare during the 80s it was pointed out that preschools and leisure-time centres were for all children. And one can praise Swedish childcare to live up to these intentions in this period. Integration of children in need of special support in these activities was considered as a natural task. The question was, rather, how well the integration functioned. But towards the end of the 90s this view changed. It was no longer given that children who needed special support should be integrated in the regular activities. The conditions change drastically. The mid-90s saw extensive cuts of staff, while in some leisure-time centres the number of children has doubled. The activities children in need of special support will be integrated into, looked different at the end of the 90s than fifteen years earlier. Even the ideological debate changed. Words such as democracy, solidarity, and community had been replaced by market terms of efficiency and cost consciousness (Klerfelt 2002). Despite this change Peter Karlsudd (1999) names the leisure-time centre "The last integration reserve" in his theses. The decrease of the integration of children with special needs are most pronounced in the school and the preschool, while relatively many children still are integrated in leisure-time centres. Karlsudd is one of the very few Swedish researchers using both quantitative and qualitative methods when involving 96 integrated children participating in 73 institutions in his study. In his analysis he uses symbolic interactionism, but also other theories that are common when researching questions of integration. In his theses Karlsudd describes integrated children's situation at leisure-time centres as good. 2011 Karlsudd repeats his study. This time the results are nowhere near as positive as in the first study. The results from the new study show that there has been an increased segregation of children from special schools in leisure-time centres, in line with the change in the compulsory education. The researcher believes that cuts in the economy and the restructuring have played an important role in this change and not least a change in the approach to how knowledge is constructed, which is represented by the schools that have had influence on the activity in the leisure time centre.

Eva Siljehag (2007) also deals with special education in her thesis but she underlines that special education in some respects depends on school-age educare. Her point of departure is to describe, explain, and understand the importance of preschool and school-age educare for special education.

### *Teachers' Professionalism*

In the middle of the 80s the leisure-time pedagogue entered the world of the school. The meeting with the school was turbulent. Why were there so many conflicts? The reasons for cooperation between school and the leisure-time centre were both of economical and pedagogical nature. The teamwork between the schoolteacher and

the leisure-time pedagogue was officially regarded an agent for educational change to take place in schools. Several researchers took interest in the deepened cooperation and integration between the leisure-time centre and school and the collaboration between leisure-time pedagogues and teachers and the social practice that occurred (Calander, 1999; Haglund, 2004; Hansen, 1999; Munkhammar 2001).

In his thesis Finn Calander (1999) finds that the teacher position in the educational institution dominates the position of the leisure-time pedagogue. An unequal occupational relation has, thus, been established, which makes collaboration in interprofessional work teams harder. The aim of his study was to analyse how occupational function of the leisure-time pedagogue was constituted through oral interaction during planning sessions in interprofessional work teams. One work team in two schools in the same municipality was chosen, and followed during one term. The study had a social constructionist/constructivist perspective. Data was constructed as episodes, and the notion of strategic context, derived from Anthony Giddens theory of structuration, was used in data analysis. In his conclusion Calander states that leisure-time pedagogues wishing to keep or develop an occupational identity as leisure-time pedagogues could best do so outside of school and outside of interprofessional collaboration with teachers.

Hansen (1999) studies the same phenomenon, but having partly different explanations why the meeting between the school and the leisure-time centre were so turbulent. She explores the relation between the two different yet related professional cultures, teachers and leisure-time pedagogues, in their collaborative work in the Swedish primary school. It is an ethnographic case study of development of collaboration between the two teaching traditions, in two schools with somewhat different organisational structures. The emphasis is on the intersection between these two professions and their two professional cultures. The two categories of teachers have different conceptions of their professional identity; depending on which tradition they belong to. The primary school teacher focuses her function as a mediator in children's learning, while the pedagogue, from the pre-school tradition, sees herself mainly as a model for the child. Teachers and leisure-time pedagogues also build and shape the physical and mental environment for their work with the children from different perspectives. These are summarised in the metaphors of "school as a work place" and "recreational centre as a home". These differences, in turn, are mirrored in different strategies in collaborative situations, strategies that sometimes give rise to misunderstandings and overt or covert conflicts between the two groups, since the underlying conceptions of the professional identities are not brought to the surface. The teachers' professional culture is described, here, as a culture with relatively strong classification and framing. A line of indicators point in the same direction in relation to their professional history. Correspondingly we can discern parallels between the weaker classifications and framing that characterise the professional culture of the pedagogues and factor in the historical background and development of their professional practice.

Haglund (2004) explores leisure-time pedagogues' ways of working with the children in the school. In his study he describes how 13 leisure time pedagogues' experience their work, accomplish circle times and use content within the circles. The description and analysis are based on different data-collection methods including interviews, video-recording of a circle-time, stimulated recall of the video-recorded material, follow-up discussion, and video analysis. Giddens (1984) theory of struc-

turation has been a point of departure for the analysis. The study has resulted in the identification of three different forms of working practice, described as social directed practice, school directed practice and integrating practice. These working practices are regionalised and support different social positions of labour. These positions are: social fosterer, school assistant, school follower, and integrating renewer. The results indicate that teachers do not necessarily dominate the leisure time pedagogues as regards the content of their activities in circle time. It is possible for leisure time pedagogues to demarcate and control their own work. The results also indicate that it is possible for leisure-time pedagogues to contribute to the integration of the different traditions and in that way help change existing work in school.

We can conclude by noting that during the 90s the profession was studied in relation to the assignment of the schoolteacher due to the cooperation with the school. Today, the researchers' attention is directed towards the mission.

Hjalmarsson/Löfdahl (forthcoming) dwell upon a new practice of leisure-time centres and a clarified leisure-time pedagogue profession and its relation to extended demands on high quality, and they also explore leisure-time centres as an arena for cultural governance of childhood (Hjalmarsson/Löfdahl, 2013). Further, Hjalmarsson (2013) discusses a tension between aspects of voluntariness and government in leisure-time centres on the basis of the pedagogues' interpretations and understanding of their commission and work.

There are also three other ongoing studies exploring teachers' professionalism. Anneli Hippinen (manuscript) studies leisure-time pedagogues pedagogical strategies in the classroom as well as during school-age educare time. Her main research question deals with how leisure-time pedagogues' pedagogical strategies can be described. Catarina Andishmand (manuscript) is interested in how leisure-time pedagogues design the activity in the leisure-time centre in relation to the children's age, maturity, interests, needs and earlier experiences. The purpose of her study is to shed light upon how norms and social categories are expressed in the way pedagogues talk and act. Anna Klerfelt (manuscript 2014) are also interested in teachers' professionalism and by listening to leisure-time pedagogues' narratives about their mission. She tries to reveal if there is a shared general discourse in the educational traditions providing the basis for leisure-time centre activity. And if so, how do teachers in leisure-time centres describe their work and how do they say that they realize their intentions?

If there are goals to achieve, maybe assessment is needed and this is a task new to the leisure-pedagogues. Birgit Andersson (2010, 2013) presents a study that focuses on leisure-time pedagogues' experiences of assessment in school and leisure-time centres. She asserts that leisure-time pedagogues often assess the development of children's social competencies, activities in the centre and the leisure-time pedagogues' own contributions. These assessments are, however, mainly based on informal observations without any other documentation. She claims that the leisure-time pedagogues do not have an entirely positive attitude towards assessments and that one explanation for this is that assessments are closely associated with "...the type of assessments that were previously common in schools. [...] This is far from the sphere that leisure-time pedagogues are used to" (Andersson 2010, p. 205).

### *Comparative Research*

Over the years many researchers have been interested in comparing the Swedish school-age educare system with other countries (Cohen et al 2004; Moss/Petrie/Poland 1999). Their interest is motivated by the fact that "...the educational and public policy whose discourse and value system are fairly typical of other Nordic countries, but less common elsewhere" (Moss/Petrie/Poland 1999, p. 48). And they continue:

Important considerations within developing policy and practice are decentralisation, the openness of the school as a community institution and the respect given to pupils and to parents as co-operators with professionals and as co-constructors of knowledge, rather than passive recipients of services. Because the discourses around children and childhood are so distinct and powerful in Sweden, we start (rather than conclude) this consideration of 'school inclusion' by exploring something of this rich and developing thinking on children and childhood, because these must be taken into account and given full weight if the aspirations of the Swedish educational system are to be understood. (1999, p. 48)

Other researchers interested in comparative studies are Haglund and Anderson (2009). They compare the content in Swedish leisure-time centres to after school programs in the US. In their article they relate the content in these institutions to definitions and discourses regarding meaningful leisure and learning. It is argued that "...the content of the activities and the way they are organized can be experienced as joyful and even fun, although many of these activities are developing, enriching and are conducted with a purpose over and above being fun" (Haglund/Anderson 2009, p. 127).

Marie Karlsson, Annika Löfdahl, Marja-Leena Böök, and Satu Perällä-Littunen study (manuscript) relations between before-and after-school care and childhood institutionalization in Sweden and Finland. In their ongoing project they specifically aim to study how responsibility for children's lives between home and school are negotiated and allocated in parents', children's and teachers' stories of before- and after-school care.

From research we now turn to evaluations directed at school-age educare.

### *Evaluations of the Swedish Leisure-Time Centre*

The Swedish National Agency for Education is the central administrative authority for the Swedish public school system for children, young people and adults, as well as for preschool activities and school-age educare for school children. The National Agency has published several reports and evaluations concerning the activity in leisure-time centres since the responsibility for the leisure-time centres were transferred to the Ministry of Education and Science in 1996. One of the first reports was called 'Finns fritids? En utvärdering av kvalitet i fritidshem' (2000). The provocative title, translated to English, is 'Do leisure-time centre exist? An evaluation of quality within leisure-time centres', aimed to critically discuss the content of activity in the leisure-time centres since the Swedish National Agency for Education did not consider the leisure-time centres to reach the expected standard. The Swedish National Agency for Education has repeatedly criticized certain aspects of the leisure-time centre (for example 2006, 2008, 2009, 2010). Criticized aspects have, just like mentioned earlier, been the increasing child to staff ratio, but also the fact that the staff

had no time to take part in the children's activities and that the activities often only consisted of free play. The Swedish National Agency for Education also asserted that free play is valuable but asked for a variation of activities and the agency also criticized the municipalities for their lack of objectives and evaluations concerning leisure-time centres.

### *More Recent Research Presented in Edited Volumes*

The scarcity of reports and constructions of knowledge directed to leisure-time centres and the pedagogy developed in this practice has also resulted in a shortage of teaching media, a shortage that university teachers interested in this pedagogy have taken seriously. Teachers interested in school-age educare employed at Swedish universities have, for decades, connected to form national network. This network is a committed and vibrant organisation that meets annually and works closely and discusses actual issues in the education of teachers towards work in leisure-time centres. One issue discussed in recent years is the lack of publications of research-based findings on leisure-time centres and school-age educare. To cover this gap several edited volumes have been formulated and we can expect more to come.

## 6 Reflections

Modern theories emphasising the importance of meaning-making processes in everyday practices and changed conditions for the profession and the teacher education imply changed prerequisites for research directed towards school-age educare in Sweden. These changed prerequisites have caused a newly awakened interest for the educational mission of this field.

### *Wants and Requirements*

Grants for research and implementation of higher education in the shape of master programmes and post graduate studies are important bricks in the work for constructing a solid field of research. The lack of these two important constituents holds back the development of the field and requires actions from the national policymakers, in order to be able to function as tools for initiating change in both the activity for children attending school-age educare and the teacher education.

### *Support From the Swedish National Agency for Education*

The Swedish National Agency for Education has, in a commendable way, highlighted the importance of children's rights to educare activity of high quality, parents' rights of good care for their children, and the rights for the leisure-time pedagogues to carry out their intentions to build an inspiring, challenging, and attractive activity for the children. As mentioned before, the National Agency has evaluated the Swed-



ish municipalities in a number of reports. These evaluations have shown that public subventions intended for the activity in leisure-time centres have been assigned for activities in the preschools and the schools and not to leisure-time centres which was the purpose. Leisure-time centres have suffered significant cuts which in some places have resulted in large groups of children in the leisure-time centres, decreases in the quality of the activity, often run in substandard facilities which has resulted in poor working environment for the leisure-time pedagogues and the children. Different parts of the activity have been subjected to careful scrutiny and political leaders have been criticized. These criticisms have led to some municipalities designating leisure-time centres as a strategic area and promptly allotting means to improve the situation, such as reducing the number of children in groups and ensuring that the leisure-time pedagogues receive training. Two big Swedish municipalities, Stockholm and Malmö, have also evaluated their own educational outcomes and reached the conclusion that school-age educare is one important factor for school success and wellbeing (Falkner /Ludvigsson, 2012; Isaksson, 2012).

### *Research Gaps*

In the existing stock of research covering school-age educare in Swedish leisure-time centres research gaps do exist. The following section will highlight some issues that should be researched more thoroughly. Most research directed at school-age educare has neglected the children's perspectives concerning their everyday activity in their leisure-time centre. This means that the view from a vital group, the children, has, to a great extent, not been taken into consideration when it comes to content, activities, and opportunities to develop social skills and new interests in the leisure-time centre. To find out how children reason concerning the time they spend in their leisure-time centre is of importance in future research.

Another issue to study is the content of the activities in leisure-time centres. More research should be directed towards describing the social practice and the activities in leisure-time centres and how and in what way this educational practice can make a difference when it comes to children's making of meaning.

An additional issue to research is the profession of the leisure-time pedagogues/teachers towards work in leisure-time centres. Further, another issue could be how responsible civil servants at a national and municipal level regard their understandings of official policy documents considering the leisure-time centre. In other words, researchers need to try to find out the opinions of both the pedagogues and the policy-makers concerning the meaning of the activity in the leisure-time centre and the way it is governed.

### *Important Points for International Collaboration*

From a Swedish point of view an international collaboration is of great interest.

Research collaborations could be accomplished through comparative studies concerning for example the construction of knowledge in leisure-time centres, the profession, the teacher education towards work in educare activities, government and policy documents, and quality issues.

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