

## English summaries

**Per Lindqvist:** "Let the teachers be teachers" – ideas on teachers' work in the public conversation on teacher assistants

The article draws attention to the recent public discussion in Swedish media on the need for unloading for teachers. In this discussion, the introduction of teacher assistants has been presented as a potentially effective measure. The media texts are analysed with the help of a content analysis, in which the conversation is seen as part of a turn in the conversation about the school and the teaching work which in the long run can contribute to a redefinition of teacher's work. The general questions in the article revolve around what different ideas about the teachers' work that occur and which are given dominance in the conversation. The analysis is linked to theories on professionalization where a public conversation can be regarded as a process where the differentiation of teachers work can be described as a struggle for territories where borders are marked. How teacher assistants as well as their roles and functions are defined in the conversation can thus be seen as an expression of teacher professionalization. The study also discusses how the conversation may affect future shifts of borders around, above all, the social dimension of the teaching work.

The result shows that the exposure of the term "teacher assistant" in the media increased explosively in the beginning of 2016. The analysis also shows that the media conversation has been characterized by consensus on the idea of the "pure" teaching work where the teachers are to devote themselves to teaching and handing other surrounding "dirty work" to either occupational groups with lower status in the organization or professional groups with specialist expertise. The study also shows how the public conversation about teacher assistants has influenced the political driving forces in which decisions are made that affect laws and regulations. Also in these texts there are arguments for a differentiation of the teaching work, where parts that do not belong to teaching are equally or even better done by others.

Finally the study shows that the conversation about the introduction of teacher assistants in Swedish schools can be seen as a step backwards towards a reduction of the social dimension of the teaching work, where teacher

assistants take over the care of and relational work with students and where the teacher's work are much more restricted to classrooms. The consequences of this for the teachers' pupils is discussed in the end of the article. It is proposed that changes in the teaching profession's domain of activity can also mean shifts in the view of schoolchildren. Processes of defining domains by delegating "dirty" work can also include increasing social distance to less-desirable clients. Hence there is a risk of teacher assistants are assigned the responsibility for teaching pupils in need of special support, pupils who are probably in greatest need of well-educated teachers.

**Maria Olsson, Elisabeth Lindgren Eneflo and Gunilla Lindqvist:**

Teaching in preschool – a concept in motion

Swedish preschools have, for the past decade, been governed by the same regulations as other forms of schooling within the educational system (SNAE, 2018; SFS 2010:800). Like other forms of schooling, primary and post-primary levels, the concept of teaching is now part of the preschool environment. Teaching is defined in the Swedish Education Act (SFS 2010: 800, chapter 1, §3) as a set of “goal-driven processes that, under the guidance of teachers or preschool teachers, aim to develop children and enable them to learn through the acquisition of knowledge and values” (our translation). The fact that teaching now relates to the education of society’s youngest children may appear contradictory, and the notion of teaching, with its connotations of primary and post-primary levels, has previously been avoided in this context. In the Swedish preschool, teaching has been traditionally downplayed, favouring instead the more holistic approach called *educare*, which argues that play, care, development and learning are intended to be woven together (e.g. OECD, 2006; SNAE, 2008). However, in recent years the emphasis on learning and on how preschools and preschool staff can encourage learning has become more prominent in Swedish policy documents. Unlike the more advanced school forms, where teaching is a given concept, formulating teaching as a central component of the preschool curriculum is not unproblematic.

The purpose of this study is to develop knowledge about how preschool teachers give different meanings to teaching in preschool. The following research questions have been asked: According to the preschool teachers, how can teaching be reflected in their interactions with preschool children? What emerges as teaching or not teaching in the descriptions and reasoning of the preschool teachers?

In this study, teaching relates to the different logics of responsibility of preschool teachers in terms of *professional responsibility* and *accountability* (Englund & Solbrekke, 2015). The former logic means that teachers are given the autonomy, based on their experience, to practice their profession. The latter logic is based on the extent to which teachers are subject to external control, measurement and calculation (Englund & Solbrekke, 2015). It is also relevant to discuss the *jurisdictional control* of preschool teachers concerning teaching in preschool (Abbott, 1988) and how this relates to the preschool teacher's profession. To show how attitudes about the preschool teacher's profession, such as professional responsibility and accountability, emerge, we use the concept of *ideological dilemmas* (Billig, et al., 1996). These can be understood as negotiations in which different arguments are put forward in order to justify a particular action in relation to an opposing view.

This study was carried out during 2017–2020 and conducted as a research circle, within the tradition of participatory action research. The research circle, a primarily considered Nordic variety of such research, is intended to constitute a meeting place for practitioners, for example preschool teachers, and researches, where conversations are held on relevant issues (cf. Holmstrand & Härnsten, 2003). Ten meetings were held across the period and included two researchers and a total of fifteen preschool teachers with between two and twenty years of professional experience. The circle took its point of departure of its participants' questions about teaching based on their experience and knowledge of preschool activities.

The analysis, which followed the procedure for a qualitative content analysis, highlighted the following meanings of teaching: teaching from a didactic perspective and teaching as a concept in motion. The didactic aspects partially overlap and are imbued with tensions between different content (school subject- and value-oriented), forms (goal- and process-oriented) realisations (spontaneous and planned) and initiators (adult- and child-initiated). Teaching appears to be a wide-ranging concept, without fixed limits for its beginning or end. It is created in the preschool teachers' interactions with children, there and then. What teaching cannot mean is, therefore, difficult to identify, but it seems not to occur when, because of inadequate conditions, teachers are unable to carry out their intentions.

The results highlight a number of ideological dilemmas (cf. Billig et al., 1988), such as the tension between the management of preschool teachers towards predefined and national goals and what occurs in the moment, in the interactions between teachers and children in the local context. This dilemma can be understood when teachers are both assigned certain responsibilities and attribute responsibility for teaching, which can be linked to different logics of responsibilities – professional responsibility and accountability (cf. Englund & Solbrekke, 2015). Through the conversations in the research circle, the preschool teachers were given the space to strengthen their voices.

In accordance with professional responsibility, they stress their judgement and their ability to make conscious decisions tailored to specific situations; they are opposed to a narrowly goal-driven approach to teaching. Such teaching is assumed to threaten the traditions of the preschool. In different ways and in recurring conversations, the teachers appear to protect these traditions by emphasising children's play alongside their exploratory, co-influencing and teaching role. Accordingly, the teachers in this study seem to strive to both preserve existing traditions and develop new thinking about the preschool environment. In this way they appeared to strengthen their jurisdictional control (cf. Abbott, 1988) concerning education in preschool vis-à-vis other professions.