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The child in the Swedish preschool photograph versus the child in the curriculum – a comparison of contemporary notions

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ABSTRACT

Photographs constitute an important visual language in contemporary Swedish preschool, as they are legible to young children themselves. This article aims to examine which notions of the child are represented in preschool photographs, and how these notions correlate to notions of the child expressed in the Swedish preschool curriculum. The analysis uses Fairclough's critical discourse analyses and the critical concepts of *performativity* and *celebrated subject positions*. First, the curriculum's descriptions of the child and modes of learning in preschool are analysed. Second, photographs from four preschools are thematised, analysed and theorised, with a focus on the performances and subject positions repeatedly displayed. Results show that while the curriculum promotes holistic performances where play and care are interwoven with education, the photographs celebrate performances within teacher-led educational situations and invisibilise care as well as play. The focus on education in the photographs corresponds with international trends regarding the professionalisation and 'schoolification' of early childhood education. Crucially, this is connected to gendered meanings linked to care and education, respectively.

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Introduction

Preschool in Sweden is, since 1998, part of the Swedish educational system, which is publicly financed and aims to promote equality and non-discrimination (chap. 1. 5 § SFS 2010, 800). Gender equality is regarded as a core value (Lenz Taguchi 2004). Drawing on Fairclough's critical discourse analysis (CDA), the *National Swedish curriculum for preschool* (Skolverket 2018) is here perceived as a social structure, meaning that it is a regulatory text that exists in dialogue with discursive preschool practices. Discourses about the child, gender and learning in different levels are negotiated, adjusted to or resisted through this dialogue. Throughout the years the preschool curriculum has

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explicitly highlighted the importance of gender equality (Skolverket 2018, 5, 7, 13, 14, 16, 17, 21), and expressed the need of actively counteracting stereotypical gender patterns and expand children's ranges of opportunities.

However, research indicates that certain performances that serve to reproduce gender-stereotypical notions, are celebrated in the preschool practice (Hellman 2010; Eidevald 2009; Günther-Hanssen 2020). Hellman (2010) describes how preschool teachers expect girls to be calm and well-behaved without teacher encouragement, while boys are expected to protest and test limits, and therefore need positive feedback to behave well. Such expectations are counterproductive when it comes to achieving the curriculum goal of gender equality.

During their time in preschool, children are typically exposed to documentation photographs, posted on the walls, on an everyday basis (Lindgren Eneflo 2014). These photographs thus become an important 'visual language' (Hall 1997), which also is legible to children themselves. It is therefore relevant to examine what these photographs represent, and especially how they contribute to celebrating certain performances and subject positions in preschool.

Furthermore, in international contexts, Nordic preschools are characterised and presented by the concept of 'educare', which combines education and care, both of which include *play* as an important condition for development and learning. This holistic approach to education and care is held forth in the Swedish preschool curriculum. Therefore, care and education as a whole, could be expected to be represented as central also in photographs of everyday preschool activities.

In addition, education and care are concepts linked to gendered values (Osgood 2006; Sims 2014). Osgood (2006) describes how the emotional labour within Early childhood education (ECE) is characterised by an ethic of care, associated with feminine values, while the strong influence of neoliberal discourses on education often involves masculine coded values as rationalism and competitiveness. This raises the question of how gendered values linked to care and education are made visible in the photographs.

This article analyses how children and their preschool activities are represented in documentation photographs in Swedish preschools. The following sections offer a brief contextualisation of preschool in Sweden, and introduces the study's theoretical perspectives and methodology.

Preschool in Sweden

Preschool in Sweden functions both as childcare support for working parents and, and as the first step in the Swedish educational system. Today, about 85% of children in Sweden between ages 1 and 5 years attend preschool. Among 4- and 5-year-olds, attendance is over 95% (Skolverket 2020).

One hallmark of Swedish preschool is the idea that learning takes place everywhere and all the time, though the teachers are not always teaching (Roth and Holmberg 2019). This notion is reflected in the term 'educare', a specific Nordic conception of education and care as inseparable. Preschool education 'should be characterised by care, development and learning coming together to form a whole' (Skolverket 2018, 14). Thus, the curriculum does not separate formal teaching situations from informal learning.

Nevertheless, although the term ‘educare’, in international contexts, is used to describe early childhood education (ECE) in the Nordic countries, there is a tendency to dichotomise care and education, in Sweden and other Nordic countries as well (Halldén et al. 2001). According to Sims (2014), care and education are associated with different values, attributed to the different origins and reasons for providing them to society. While emotional labour and care are associated with feminine values, there seems to be little room for feminine characteristics in an educational system that is strongly influenced by neoliberal ideas (Osgood 2006). Accordingly, a hierarchy seems to be present in Swedish preschool, where childminders, with a short educational background, traditionally have been engaging with care-demanding, younger children, while preschool teachers engage in school-like pedagogical activities with the older children (Halldén et al. 2001), a tendency that has intensified with the ongoing professionalisation of preschool (Liljestrand 2020).

This professionalisation, or schoolification, of preschool is also visible in revisions of the curriculum (2010, 2018), which explicitly give a more prominent place to teaching particular subjects, such as technology (Axell 2013). The revisions are presented as based on intentions to offer more time and space for constructing and creating with different techniques, materials and tools, and one main, long-term purpose of this prioritisation is to prepare children with equal knowledge in technology to achieve a more equitable and gender-equal society (Axell 2013).

Aligned with the ongoing professionalisation of preschool and the revised curriculum, teachers have come to associate concepts like caring and children’s needs with an outdated preschool discourse, originating from a period when preschool should be homelike and teachers should feel love and care for the children like a family (Alvestad 2004; Folkman 2017). Such trends towards a schoolification of preschool are notable in several Nordic countries (Liljestrand 2020; Brogaard Clausen 2015; Otterstad and Braathe 2016), and seem to come with demands for documentation and evaluation.

Visual discourses, performativity and celebrated subject positions

The use of photographs in preschool is often part of pedagogical documentation, which is a work tool, recommended in Swedish preschool since 2012 (Skolverket 2012). Photographs are displayed on the preschool walls and reflected upon by children, guardians and preschool employees. According to Eriksson and Göthlund (2012), meaning can only be created through the languages we have access to, and many preschool children are not able to read yet. Therefore, working with young children, visual languages become important mediators in negotiating subject positions and power relations. The visual languages seem capable of both challenging and serving to re/produce discourses by making desired performances visible.

Most previous research conducted on preschool documentation, has focused on preschool teachers’ experiences. These studies have addressed documentation text material, text and image material, or communication around documentation (Markström 2011; Löfdahl and Folke-Fichtelius 2015; Emmoth 2014; Liljestrand and Hammarberg 2017; Nilfyr 2018; Folkman 2017; Lindroth 2018).

In this article, documentation is regarded as a practice, which is in communication both with its’ audience (children, guardians) and social structures such as the curriculum.

Fairclough (2003) defines discourses as social practices and structures, which consist of languages used to communicate within and between different levels. In this communication, discourses work to celebrate certain positions and performances, and marginalise others (Carlone, Scott, and Lowder 2014). Thereby, the photographs constitute performatives that make visible what is possible to be or do, and what is impossible within the borders of normality (Foucault 1993).

The concept of performativity is used to describe how discourses are prescribed in the subjects and affect the subjects' constructions of themselves (Butler 1990). Performativity explains how discourses serve to celebrate different subject positions, by repeating specific performances from subjects defined through specific categories like gender, class or ethnicity, but also as children or adults. Accordingly, performativity can be used to study how discourses, activated in the photographs, make different subject positions available, but also celebrated, within the same discursive practice.

Interactions with the photographs and different practices of looking, activate power relations (Lindgren 2012; Eriksson 2019; Pink 2013). When photographs of children are displayed and looked at, children become objects available for comments by others (Lindgren 2012), but their positions in the photographs also become performatives that re/produce and celebrate certain positions (Butler 1990; Carlone, Scott, and Lowder 2014). To repeatedly make certain positions or performances visible, also make them celebrated (Carlone, Scott, and Lowder 2014), for the children to adjust to. Hence, the photographs constitute a visual language, which constitutes performatives to govern children into acting as desirable/proper preschool children.

Drawing on the perception of preschool photographs as an important visual language to the children themselves, and critical discourse analysis, the following questions guide the study:

- What subject positions and performances are celebrated in the photographs?
- How do these compare to the set of possible subject positions and performances expressed in the curriculum?
- How do these positions and performances relate to gendered values?

Materials and methods

The empirical material for this article is part of a larger study about children's perspectives on preschool documentation and consists of about 900 analogue and digital photographs and field notes from site visits at the preschools. Photographs were collected from six classes in four preschools in areas around Stockholm. The classes served children of different ages: 1–3-year-olds (2 classes), 2–3-year-olds (1 class) and 4–6-year-olds (3 classes). For this article, only analogue photographs ($n = 550$) displayed on the preschool walls were analysed.

In all studied classes, the adults produced the photographs, selected them and put them on the walls. All classes had one main DW (MDW) for photographs. The MDWs of all classes except for one showed photographs from the ongoing preschool project. The MDWs were centrally situated, where children and guardians had access to them. Two classes had special outdoor walls (OW), showing excursions to the

forest. One of these was situated in one of the play rooms, mostly available to the children, while the other was placed where guardians picked their children up, and thereby was directly available to the guardians. Photographs on the OWs stood out from the other material, and they are therefore separately analysed in another article, which is part of the larger study. Three classes had presentation walls (PW), where all children were featured in one photograph each, presenting some material or product. One class had several PWs and they were placed in different places, while another class had them situated close to the area reserved for 'circle time', where they could be reflected on when the children were assembled with a teacher for 'circle time'. Three classes had collections of photographs that showed activities possible to conduct with certain materials, situated by those materials, and referred to as instruction walls (IW). Where the photographs are displayed and who has possibilities to interact with them become important, while visual methods pay attention, not only to the images but also to the context around them (Pink 2013).

The study has permission from the ethics review board in Uppsala (Etikprövningsnämnden), and although it is difficult to estimate children's understandings when giving informed consent, no child tried to hinder the collection of data, and there were no indications that this research could harm participating children. To get to know the children, the teachers and the practice, and for everyone to feel safe with the research, the lead author made about 45 site visits to the preschools during the data collection. All data have been confidentially handled in within the work of this article.

The study was conducted by comparing existing photographs in preschool practices to formulations about the task of preschool in the curriculum (Skolverket 2018), by using Fairclough's critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 2003) and activating the critical concepts *performativity* (Butler 1990) and *celebrated subject positions* (Carlone, Scott, and Lowder 2014).

In the first layer of analysis, a thematic image analyses, using NVivo to sort and code the photographs, was conducted. The analyses entailed categorisations of 'the doing', and what materials that were used in each photograph. Moreover, the analyses noted how children's bodies were pictured, central or peripheral, and if their faces were visible. Theoretically driven questions were then posed to the material to examine celebrated subject positions, performances and modes of learning.

In the second phase of analysis, a discursive analyses of the curriculum was made by distinguishing words and expressions that were used to describe children, their characteristics and desirable modes of learning from the text. Using NVivo and Excel, commonly used descriptions were identified and interpreted as celebrated.

Finally, Fairclough's (2003) theories of communication between structures and social practices were employed by making a comparison with interpreted celebrated subject positions and performances in the photographs with writings in the curriculum. These comparisons were then scrutinised from perspectives of femininity, masculinity and gender equality.

Results

The results are presented in two main sections: The first section describes prominent notions of the present and future child in the curriculum; the second section presents

how the child is displayed in the photographs. The results are compared in the discussion.

The preschool curriculum: a holistic view on the child

The National Swedish curriculum for preschool (2018) prescribes a holistic view on children's competences and needs and covers a broad set of opportunities for how to develop learning in collaboration with peers and teachers in preschool.

Celebrating the curious and creative child

The curriculum views the child as a subject, a being, with abilities and interests of their own. Preschool education builds on and pays attention to children's existing abilities, conditions, understandings, interests and experiences. Although children are described as independent subjects, they are also perceived as malleable and susceptible to normative structures. The repeated declarations about the importance of combatting traditional gender norms in the curriculum (Skolverket 2018, 5, 7, 13, 14, 16, 17, 21), note that the child is a subject in need of support to resist gender stereotypes.

Interpreting writings about recommended preschool activities, celebrated characteristics of the child, appears as curiosity, activity, creativity, a desire to explore and the ability to reflect upon one's own learning. Through imitation, exploration and participation in group activities, the child is expected to develop and learn from others. Moreover, celebrated performances for the child is to initiate activities and raise questions to gain knowledge. Children are thus understood as motivated subjects. Celebrated learning modes are understood as collective and equal in value. Structural inequalities are to be compensated for by teachers' active efforts:

The preschool also has responsibility to combat gender patterns that limit the children's development, choices and learning. (Skolverket 2018, 7)

Celebrating play and learning as interwoven performances

When children enter preschool, they are expected to start developing knowledge from their own experiences. Learning is defined as a constantly ongoing process in all different moments of the day and in contact with other children, different materials, techniques and ways of expression. Situations like meals, getting dressed and spontaneous play are described as equally important learning situations as planned activities are. According to the curriculum, exploration, curiosity and a desire to play should be the foundation of preschool education.

All children should be offered the 'time, space and peace' (Skolverket 2018, 7) for play in preschool. Play entails opportunities to imitate, imagine, communicate and solve problems. The curriculum makes play a celebrated performance by underlining the importance of every child's possibilities to participate in shared games on their own terms and regardless of gender. The use of words like communication, collaboration and shared games celebrates play as a collective activity.

Play should play a central role in the education. An approach by everyone who is part of the work team and an environment that encourages play confirms the importance of play for children's development, learning and well-being. (Skolverket 2018, 8)

Throughout preschool, children are expected to learn about many subjects: nature, science, technology, mathematics, the Swedish language, national minorities and different cultures. As knowledge is to be gained by interaction, access to languages is consequently described as necessary. Besides spoken languages, the curriculum states that preschools should provide opportunities ‘to experience, portray and communicate through different aesthetic forms of expression such as image, form, drama, movement, singing, music and dance’ (Skolverket 2018, 9). The curriculum thus celebrates a diversity of modes of expression.

Celebrating the responsible (future) citizen

Throughout preschool, children’s abilities and understandings are expected to develop through teachers’ challenging, encouraging, offering, inspiring and stimulating work. The future celebrated subject position is a school-ready child and, in the longer term, a responsible member of society. Preschool teachers are expected to function as role models and introduce healthy lifestyles, with physical activities and nutritious meals as natural parts of everyday life. The below passage emphasises the notion of the child as already provided with competences but in need of teachers’ guidance in the right direction:

Education should be undertaken in democratic forms and lay the foundation for a growing interest and responsibility among children for active participation in civic life and for sustainable development. (Skolverket 2018, 5)

Ideas about shaping democratic citizens who care responsibly for nature and social sustainability celebrate ‘participation’ and democratic ways of socialising to support children’s development of empathy and abilities to solve conflicts.

The preschool photographs: an educational view on the child

In contrast to the holistic ideas communicated in the curriculum, the photographs mainly express notions of the child as an active part of planned educational situations. Missing from the photographs were activities valued in the curriculum, such as play, aesthetic performances and care. The following categories of celebrated subject positions repeated in the photographs were found: *the collaborative producer*, *the accomplished learner*, and *the independent reader*.

The collaborative producer – learning by doing

Most MDWs included photographs that celebrated the child as creative and constructive, producing artefacts, using materials such as glue, paint, papers, pens, nature materials and waste, in teacher-initiated educational activities. These photographs pictured constructive and productive performances, mainly in collective modes, but in two classes, displays of individual children in producing modes occurred. Collective modes were displayed by showing several children together at a table filled with different materials, and celebrated subject positions as collective learners who were able, or expected, to collaborate with each other. Individual modes were displayed by showing one child in each photograph, performing similar tasks. One photograph of each child in the class was grouped on a PW. Aside from celebrating the individual learner, several photographs

placed next to each other highlighted that every single child, regardless of gender, had been active in this joint activity.

Children's faces were sometimes visible, and it was possible to see their expressions of emotions like excitement or joy. In other classes, it was common to publish photographs without visible faces. These photographs showed materials, processes of construction, products in the making and body parts, such as the hands or arms of the children. The display makes children's identities positioned as less important, and the significance of gender is toned down by the anonymisation. Thus, celebrated performances of children's own production were the same.

The accomplished learner – learning through mediation

About a third of all photographs show children in self-controlled, seemingly passive positions, listening to or watching teachers, assuming a position of an accomplished learner. In contrast to the previous category, teachers were in focus, dominating these photographs, while children were positioned within a group at a distance, as members of a school class, where the individuals, and thereby also gender, were hard to identify. Simultaneously as in the photographs of the anonymous collaborative producer, the photographs of the accomplished learner within a group in a distance, lessen the signification of gender.

This category was characterised by a distance between children and teachers, and it was intelligible who performed teacher and who was to be taught. The motives produce ideas of learning as taking place through mediation of knowledge from teachers to children. The celebrated subject position is an attentive and collective child.

This category also involves photographs of identifiable children showing achieved knowledge to the camera. This knowledge could be in the form of self-made (accomplished) products or the results of experiments, but it could also be intangible knowledge, like saying 'no' or 'stop' by raising one hand in front of themselves or showing the initial letter of a toy together with the toy. Children in these photographs sometimes looked into the camera and smiled. The celebrated subject positions were to have accomplished something, and to be aware of the achievement.

The autonomous reader – learning with visual instructions

Three classes had instruction walls (IWs), which were situated next to specific materials and showed how it was possible or desirable to perform with them. These materials were Legos, blocks and magnets. As a comparison, there were no IWs next to the corner of dolls, the reading spot, the dance room or other locations in the preschool class.

There were no identifiable children in these photographs, and thereby the photographs approached children, regardless of gender, inviting all children to the intended performance. Without directly displaying children, the IWs were still celebrating subject positions as those capable of reading visual instructions and autonomy. As the photographs showed products that were possible to construct from the materials, these functioned as a kind of request from the photographs to use the available material according to the pictures. The IWs could be interpreted as substitutes for teachers, and, consequently, the notion of the child was as a subject with the ability to start construction activities on their own but required help from the photographs.

Photographs communicate certain aspects of the curriculum

To employ Fairclough's (2003) explanations of communication between structures and practices, curriculum writings will be discussed in relation to performances and positions that become celebrated through the photographs. The preschool curriculum (Skolverket 2018) presents a broad range of ways to gain knowledge, with its starting point in children's own experiences and interests. At the same time, the curriculum prescribes that interests that are too gender stereotypical should be actively counteracted. The main responsibility for transferring and shaping fundamental values as well as creating an environment that inspires children to develop, learn and challenge gender patterns falls on teachers. This is supposed to happen in a holistic manner, with care, development and learning interwoven, and where play and communication form the basis for learning.

As documentation practice tends to be associated with quality (Löfdahl and Folke-Fichtelius 2015) and photographs displayed in preschool become visible for colleagues, guardians and children, it might be expected that teachers use the photographs to exhibit the quality of the preschool and their compliance with the curriculum. However, the photographs also and iteratively encourage the children to regulate their bodies in accordance with celebrated performances (Butler 1990; Carlone, Scott, and Lowder 2014).

Photographs reinforce curriculum writings

Aligned with the increasing focus on preparing preschool children for school (Brogaard Clausen 2015; Otterstad and Braathe 2016; Liljestrand 2020), which is visible in the revisions of the preschool curriculum (2010, 2018), the photographs present preschool as a place for educational practices. Moreover, focus seems to be on teaching activities, rather than highlighting the learning child. The notion of the child is a curious, productive, competent and self-regulative subject, participating in teacher-led activities.

Performances of producing are made visible in a majority of the photographs, where the celebrated subject position is 'the collaborative producer', in some classes also 'the individual producer', or sometimes 'the anonymous producer', where the production, rather than the children involved, is in focus. The photographs display children, taking on tasks to produce specific commodities as part of the preschool project, and production appears as a celebrated performance for children to adjust to. Most photographs celebrate production as a collective performance, and show a compliance to the curriculum, that describes how children should get opportunities 'to build, create and construct with different techniques and materials' (Skolverket 2018, 15) during their time in preschool. The celebration of producing performances is specifically prominent in photographs that do not show faces. In Emmoth (2014) one teacher expresses that she is not interested in who is involved in the doing; she is interested in the doing as such, and therefore no children have to be identifiable in the photographs. To picture children as anonymous, signals the performance as desirable of all children, regardless of gender, which might be a way of showing compliance to the goals of gender equality in the curriculum (Skolverket 2018).

Other photographs, which also display children as hard to identify and thereby gender neutral, are the ones where teachers speak in front of a group of children (like a school

class) in a distance. The children are pictured as attentively watching and listening, and the photographs connote to traditional school education. Curriculum writings about school preparation are reinforced, at the same time as curriculum writings about play and following children's interests and ideas as foundations for learning, are made invisible. This is in contrast to what Liljestrand (2020) and Lindroth (2018) describe about preschool teachers desire to listen to children's interests and shape activities in dialogue, but aligned with how they feel obliged by the curriculum to focus on teaching subjects. Moreover, Emmoth (2014) describes how teachers perceive documentation as a time-consuming demand, which they make manageable by limiting it to situations when the children are gathered at one place, as in project work. In some of the studied classes, project work was concentrated to one morning a week, which makes the photographs display performances that are not the most common, but rather appear as desirable in an effort to promote preschool as a place for education.

Overall, the three categories of photographs celebrate the position of a self-regulated child. According to Emilson (2008), preschool teachers desire a democratic, empathetic and self-regulated child. From Emilson's study (2008), it is also possible to extrapolate values such as independence, obedience and accomplishment, included in the teachers' desire. The photographs show how children collaboratively participate in teacher-led activities, how they attentively listen to and watch teachers teaching, how they proudly show to the camera what they have accomplished, and how they autonomously are expected to 'read' visual constructions to take on teacher-planned activities. These photographs consequently communicates notions of the child as self-regulating, a notion, which is also partly present in the preschool curriculum.

However, expectations of children are gendered, and the celebrated self-regulated subject positions seem to be desirable of all children, but expected of girls. According to Hellman (2010), teachers expect girls to internalise and maintain self-regulated preschool practices. Hellman describes how girls and boys who tried to maintain preschool structures, regardless of gender, were derogatorily called 'school girls' (2010, 108), a term with similar connotations as the English phrase 'teacher's pet'. Further, Günther-Hanssen (2020) found that girls iteratively were made intelligible in positions where bodies were self-regulated and put in calm activities. In comparison, teacher expectations about boyish behaviour as physically taking up space and obstructing given tasks (Eidevald 2009; Hellman 2010; Günther-Hanssen 2020) are made invisible in the photographs.

As described, self-regulation in preschool is expected of girls, but contradictory, self-regulation is simultaneously associated with rational and instrumental behaviours, separated from emotions. These are characteristics commonly described as masculine-coded (Silva Martins 2020), and connected to neo-liberal signs of professionalisation (Osgood 2006). The celebration of the self-regulated child in the photographs thereby mediate complex gendered connotations, associated both with traditional notions of girls and boys, and the ongoing professionalisation of ECE.

Photographs ignore curriculum writings

Compared with the broad range of ways to be and learn that is offered in the preschool curriculum, the photographs show a limited version of negotiable performances and subject positions. Performances described in the curriculum about how to encourage an awareness that the body is capable of taking up space, such as physical activities,

dancing, singing, music and acting (Skolverket 2018), are not made visible in the photographs. Instead, the photographs are focused on creativity, which always seems to result in commodities. Butler (1990) explains how performativity makes available positions understandable by repetition, and a repetition of displayed photographs of production, while simultaneously excluding performances within children's daily role-play or aesthetic expressions, consequently ignore everyday scenes where children have possibilities to question and experiment with gender roles. Hence, important democratic arenas are not visually repeated for the children to negotiate with.

Moreover, an important value of the curriculum (Skolverket 2018) is democracy, and according to Emilson (2008) 'a democratic child' is also desired by teachers. In the empirical material, signs of democracy are mainly possible to interpret from the visual technique of displaying of every child, participating in certain activities, side by side on the wall. The presentation of every single child, communicates that everyone has participated, regardless of gender, age or ethnicity. The technique is typically used in 'the accomplished learner' – category, where children show self-made products or internalised knowledges to the camera. The technique indirectly demands that every child has produced something to be displayed on the wall, which aligns with Lenz Taguchi's description of the conception that every child should participate in every activity for their own good (2004).

Other signifiers of democracy (and empathy), such as helping, caring for and comforting each other are made invisible in the photographs. Also missing are photographs of undesirable performances such as obstructing, which can be associated with children's resistance and negotiating around the practice, and consequently can be characterised as hallmarks of democracy.

A performance that is held forward as a foundation for learning in the curriculum, is play. Coelho et al. (2021) found play as the most frequent activity that children are involved in during their days in Swedish preschool, and this was also noted by the main author during the study. At the same time, the photographs typically do not celebrate play. Certainly, performances in the category of 'the collaborative producer', such as creating activities with paint and glue, could be regarded as play or playful creation, but all the displayed performances had clear aims to produce specific commodities, and every child conducted the same task. This contrasts the common perception of play as activities in a spontaneous or procedural stream without goals or products as results. The curriculum declares play as carried out for its own sake, and states the importance of giving all children the right conditions for play (Skolverket 2018). The absence of play in the photographs makes it appear as a non-celebrated performance and learning mode in the discursive practice. It also makes the focus on teaching more obvious. If children's learning processes had been the focus of the photographs, they would also include child-initiated learning situations as play.

The inclusion of play in the photographs could be expected to relate to teachers' different approaches to children's play. While all teachers seem to share a long-term vision of play as a foundation for children's future positions as responsible citizens in a democratic society, only some teachers agree that play is in need of teacher support, while others define play as independent of teacher interference (Hjelmér 2020; Coelho et al. 2021). When teachers take on a passive role when children play and do not interfere in children's activities with other children (Coelho et al. 2021), this entails a responsibility

for children themselves to figure out and negotiate local norms and gender patterns. Perhaps, this passive attitude indicates a notion of play as an activity also free from interference by documentation. However, an approach, which expects teachers to actively guide children in play, could also be expected to include documentation of play situations, to be able to reflect on norms and behaviours together with the children.

Finally, an important value in the curriculum, promoted as interwoven with education in 'educare', is care, also made invisible in the photographs. It is assumable, that this could relate to the professionalisation of preschool, which is associated with several tensions, such as the separation of care and education. In this matter, documentation seems to be a tool, which helps to increase the status of the latter, and make care invisible. Coelho et al. (2021) show that preschool teachers spend less than a fifth of a day engaged in instructing situations, and Roth et al. (2019) found that several dimensions of care were captured when filming preschool situations, while none of them was captured in the written documentation from the same situations. The documentation practice is, by preschool teachers, mentioned as a demand directly linked to the professionalisation of preschool, education and quality work (Sims 2014; Liljestrand 2020; Löfdahl and Folke-Fichtelius 2015). Teachers describe care as elusive in efforts to document preschool quality, an unplanned activity without goals, so natural that they do not find it necessary to document (Löfdahl and Folke-Fichtelius 2015).

Moreover, care has traditionally been a female task in society, and preschool education has been described as a female arena, where care and education are expected to be interwoven. Osgood (2021) has suggested values such as empathy, compassion, intuition and commitment would better constitute professionalism in ECE. If that would have been the case, perhaps photographs would have made performances of care, and the desirable 'empathetic child' (Emilson 2008) visible as well. As professionalisation today tends to focus on rational production and achievement, children's need for comfort, rest or help are made invisible. This trend of neo-liberal professionalisation appears to be consistent with other societal entrepreneurial expectations for traditionally feminine-coded professions within care practices to become more like masculine-coded businesses of production (SOU 1990). Consequently, it appears that changes initiated to encourage equality goals by upgrading feminine-coded professions are, in practice, counteracted by celebrating masculine-coded values and practices in the professionalisation work, while simultaneously suspending feminine-coded practices such as care. The reproduction of people, the raising of children and ensuring for their needs, seems to have a natural place in preschool practice, while it, through the photographs, is constructed as separated from the masculine-coded production of commodities, and also with less value. Thereby, the professionalisation of preschool seems to come with gendered values.

Conclusions and implications

The documentation practice is described with potential to enable children's involvement in everyday learning practices (Elfström 2013; Elfström Pettersson 2015; Unga 2013), enhance their possibilities to change existing power structures (Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence 1999; Lenz Taguchi 1997) and thereby challenge traditional gender patterns. However, teachers seem to fulfil the task of documentation quickly during planned

activities (Emmoth 2014; Nilfyr 2018) and thereby make certain gendered performances and subject positions visible at the expense of others.

Drawing on Fairclough's (2003) dialectical communication, an explanation for the focus on certain activities in the photographs, could be that other, more powerful structures than the curriculum, communicate with the discursive practices. These structures might be constituted by international trends and comparisons (Brogaard Clausen 2015), celebrating quantifiable and auditable values, which often are associated with masculine production and new public management (Osgood 2006).

Suggestions from Osgood (2021) to include other values when describing quality in preschool, might also suggest other ways of using photographs in preschool. Using photographs to make situations of child-initiated play and care visible, would give value to ideas that did not evolve from teachers and creativity that did not result in commodities. Moreover, children's own challenging and experimenting with stereotypical gender patterns in role-play could be made visible and reflected upon together with teachers and children.

This article addresses the language of documentation photographs and does not address other activities carried out in preschool. The specific focus on performances and positions within teacher-led, educational situations in the photographs, displays how the professionalisation of preschool carries tensions between feminine- and masculine-coded values within ECE, where masculine hegemony is maintained. This study exhibits how tools that are expressed as powerful in changing power structures (Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence 1999; Lenz Taguchi 1997) can become tools to discipline desirable performances within contemporary educational trends.

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