

*Background report prepared
for the OECD Thematic
Review of Early Childhood
Education and Care Policy.*

Early Childhood Education and Care Policy in Sweden

DECEMBER 1999



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EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE POLICY IN SWEDEN

Background report prepared for
the OECD Thematic Review

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FOREWORD

Sweden is participating together with ten other countries over the period 1998-2000 in the OECD project "Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care". The other countries are Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, the United Kingdom and the United States. The goal of the review is to provide cross-national information to improve policy-making in early childhood education and care in all OECD-countries.

This Background Report is produced in conjunction with the project as material for the review team appointed by the OECD to evaluate Child care in Sweden. The report is based on a questionnaire used in the project and describes Swedish school-age child care today and its development since the 1970s.

The report has been written by Lars Gunnarsson, Professor at the Department of Education at the University of Göteborg , Barbara Martin Korpi, Director at the Ministry of Education and Science and Ulla Nordenstam, Education Director at the National Agency for Education. In addition Catharina Bäck, Senior Administrative Officer at the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs has contributed to the section on the Swedish Social Support System.

As part of the review process, each country hosts a review team for an intensive case study visit. After each country visit the OECD produces a short Country Note that draws together background materials and the review team's observations. The OECD's Country Note on Early Childhood Education and Care Policy in Sweden has recently been published .

The Background Report and the OECD Country Note can be obtained from the Ministry of Education and Science.

Stockholm in November 1999



Staffan Bengtsson
State Secretary

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GLOSSARY

Barnomsorg	Child care
Barnskötare	Child minder
Dagbarnvårdare	Family child minder
Familjedaghem	Family day care home
Fritidshem	Lesiure-time centre
Fritidspedagog	Lesiure-time pedagogue
Förskola	Pre-school
Förskoleverksamhet	Pre-school activities
Förskollärare	Pre-school teacher
Skolbarnsomsorg	School-age child care
Öppen fritidsverksamhet	Open leisure-time activities
Öppen förskola	Open pre-school
SEK	Swedish Currency. 100 SEK=ECU 11

The Swedish Child Care System - Existing Forms

Förskoleverksamhet			Skolbarnsomsorg		
Förskola	Familjedaghem	Öppen förskola	Fritidshem	Familjedaghem samhet	Öppen fritidsverk-

I. INTRODUCTION

Child care in Sweden has been given high priority for nearly three decades and is one of the cornerstones of Swedish family policy. Reforms in the child care area have also been widely supported in the Swedish Riksdag. This has enabled implementation of a policy, whose guidelines were drawn up by the Government at the beginning of the 70s and which has since then been subsequently developed - child care of high quality, expanded with the aim of providing full coverage, with the municipalities as the main organisers and financed out of public funds.

Child care has been developed as part of family policy with linkages to labour market policy. The Ministry of Health and Social Affairs has until recently been responsible for this area, with the National Board of Health and Welfare as the supervisory authority. This means that there are close connections between child care and the family support system, e.g. parental insurance and child allowances and that child care is organised so that parents are able to combine parenthood with work and studies. A close relationship has also been developed between child care and the social services over responsibility for children in need of special support and children at risk of being badly treated. Child care has played an important role in the integration of children with disabilities into society.

This work has been expanded not primarily as a result of detailed legislation, but from state grants, earmarked for specific performance targets allocated to municipalities, in order to stimulate the development of quality for different types of activity. Childcare has received a large proportion of society's resources, but it is also quite apparent that the expansion of child care has been national economically profitable, despite the costs involved.

Nowadays child care in Sweden is a natural part of the modern welfare society and a part of the everyday reality of more than half a million families with children, 75 percent of all children aged between 1-5 years take part and 65 percent of school children between the ages of 6-9 years. At the beginning of the 90s, labour force participation rates of mothers with small children reached a peak of 86 percent and this at a time when Sweden had one of the highest birth rates in Europe.

Apart from making it possible for parents to combine parenthood with work or studies, the goal of Swedish child care has been through the provision of pedagogical activities of high quality to support and stimulate the child's development and learning and contribute to good conditions for growth.

This double function was clearly stated already in the reports from the 1968 National Commission on Child Care, which became the starting point for the expansion of the Swedish child care system. Since then this has been repeated on a regular basis in discussions, reports and goal documents at the national level, during the period when the number of children, 1-12 years old, enrolled in public child care, has increased from a modest 61 000 in 1970 to 720 000 in 1998.

Child care has thus been closely related to educational issues with the pedagogical dimension quite prominent throughout the expansion period. Well educated personnel with a high degree of pedagogical competence are a guarantee of quality, a factor which has been extremely important, particularly during periods of economic cutbacks. The pedagogical culture of the pre-school has developed over a lengthy period so that there is a consensus over how children of pre-school age develop and learn, which has also been important in disseminating knowledge about the needs and rights of children in society generally.

In Sweden there is a highly developed view of the child based on democratic values which gives respect for the child as a person in its own right and a belief in the child's inherent skills and potential. As childhood has a value in itself, the pre-school years are of great importance in the child's growing understanding of itself, the opportunities it has and its everyday reality. Swedish parents "negotiate" with, rather than dominate, their children and in the pre-school and school great efforts are made to give children influence and encourage their participation. Sweden has also come far in developing a child perspective which permeates activities and decisions affecting children. The Office of the Children's Ombudsman was set up in 1993 with the task of monitoring children's rights in accordance with the UN Convention on The Rights of the Child.

On 1st July 1996, the Ministry of Education and Science took over responsibility for child care from the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs. At that time child care had been expanded to provide virtually full coverage of needs in accordance with existing legislation, the goals set up had been largely achieved. The aim in transferring child care to the educational sector was to build on the close pedagogical links between the pre-school, school and leisure-time centres. In this transition, it was argued that the public pre-school for six year olds should be integrated with the school - this was a response to the public debate on reducing the age at which children start school from 7 to 6 years.

A number of reforms have taken place since then. Legislation on child care has been brought into the School Act and the National Agency for Education has taken over supervisory responsibility. The pre-school class for six year olds was introduced as a separate, voluntary school form to make possible the development of new working approaches and activities in cooperation between pre-school and school. Pre-school teachers and leisure-time pedagogues have been given the right to teach in school and the curriculum for compulsory school has been amended to incorporate the pre-school class and leisure-time centre. In August 1998, the pre-school received its first national curriculum for children aged between 1 to 5 years and thereby making pre-school the first step in life-long learning.

For the past 30 years, child care has been an important part of the Swedish family support system, alongside the parental leave insurance and the child allowance systems and this continues to be true also after 1996, when responsibilities for ECEC have shifted from the social to the educational sector. The overarching goals of Swedish ECEC are the fostering of democracy, equality, solidarity and responsibility. The dual focus on education and care, which is now found in the 1998 National Curriculum for pre-school is a continuation of the foundation laid down by the 1968 National Commission on Child Care.

But this has raised new issues. The most important and now widely debated issue concerns the right for all children from an early age to take part in pre-school, irrespective of if parents work or not. A universal pre-school with no fees for all children could provide a new foundation and complete the structure of Swedish ECEC if it was to be integrated in the current ECEC-settings. The task to start to prepare a Governmental bill in this direction has recently been given to the Ministry of Education and Science.

II. CONTEXTS

During the period when child care has been built up, major changes have taken place in Swedish society. The roles of women and men in family and working life have changed and so has the social and financial situation of families. Demographic, financial and social changes have all influenced the conditions under which children grow up and the opportunities for young couples to start families. Development has been particularly rapid in the 90s. Swedish child care has grown out of the changes that have taken place, but has also influenced its development.

Changing Fertility Rates

Although ranked fourth in Europe in geographical area, following Russia, France and Spain, Sweden has rather a small population, 8.9 million inhabitants. The 20th century transformation of the economic structure in Sweden, as in most of today's industrialised nations, has been coupled with a decline in mortality, a lowered fertility rate and a decrease in family size. In the second half of the century immigration has increased. During certain periods only the fact that immigration has been substantial has kept the Swedish population from decreasing.

The birth rate has varied greatly in Sweden in recent decades. After several decades of declining fertility rates, reaching a low-point in 1983 with 1.6 children per woman, fertility rates increased and reached 2.1 in the years 1990-1992, a figure among the highest in Western Europe. This has aroused great attention as Sweden is known as a country with an unusually high female labour-force participation rate, extensive non-marital cohabitation and relatively high divorce/separation rates, all of which are commonly believed to reduce rates of childbearing. Comprehensive family support programs, including public child care, and changes in gender roles were factors that were brought into various analyses of why fertility rates despite this reached such high levels.

Since then, fertility rates have been falling, reaching an all-time low of 1.5 children per woman in 1998. This is the lowest birth rate since Sweden started registering statistics in the 18th century, although it is not particularly low when compared with other European countries. This time, high unemployment rates, financial savings and cutbacks within the Swedish social support system, hitting the economy of families with children particularly hard, have been suggested as possible reasons for declining

fertility rates. In contrast to many other European countries, unemployment has not led to an increase in the birth rate. Women who are unemployed or studying are delaying the arrival of their first child. New statistics show that women also hesitate about having a second and third child.

Changes in fertility and mortality rates over the century have led to a shift in the age structure of the population. The proportion of children has declined continuously whilst elderly people have increased proportionately. Today children under 15 comprise roughly one fifth of the population, almost the same proportion as people aged 65 or over. Sweden has one of the highest proportions of elderly people in the world. Life expectancy is about 80 years for men and 85 for women.

From an Agrarian to a Post-industrial Society

Most of the 8.9 million Swedes live in the southern half of the country, especially in and around the three large metropolitan areas of Stockholm, Göteborg and Malmö. The northern half of the country is sparsely populated, but the mining, lumbering, and water power available in this area of mountains, forests and rivers has long represented one of the cornerstones of the Swedish economy, producing much of the raw materials and energy for the processing industries further south.

Agriculture is concentrated in the southernmost parts of Sweden, where large, high technology farms produce grain and meat in amounts well exceeding the needs of the population. In fact, advanced technology and these large, cost-effective production units of the Swedish agricultural industry have largely eliminated small, family-based farms, which for hundreds of years were the core of Swedish society.

Over the past hundred years the children of Swedish farmers, fishermen, and lumberjacks have moved in large numbers to urban, newly-industrialised areas, growing up to work in factories, and later in the expanding service-sector.

During this same period, Sweden has undergone a transformation from being a country of emigrants - several hundred thousand Swedes, who could no longer make a living as farmers, left for the United States before the turn of the century, to becoming a country of immigrants. An estimated 18 per cent of the population in Sweden today are first or second generation immigrants. They came in the 60s or 70s, mostly from southern Europe or Finland, to find factory-jobs in Swedish industry or in the 80s or 90s mostly as refugees from conflict-areas in Africa, Eastern Europe or the Middle East.

In 1890 more than 60 percent of the labour force worked in agriculture and forestry, a figure that had dropped to a mere 3 percent in 1998. In the service sector, the pattern is the reverse: today more than 60 percent of the labour force is employed in the areas of service, retail trade, transport and communication.

If a “post-industrial society” is a society “marked by the ascendancy of the service sector, with attendant economic, technological, and social changes that transform the character of contemporary life”, then Sweden clearly is an example of such a society. Moreover, the expansion of the service sector is largely a function of the increased number of people employed in the public service sector as administrators, teachers, nurses, child care workers, and the like. The public provision of child care and care of the elderly, health care and free education is part of the comprehensive Swedish social welfare system. The work carried out within these public domains is to a large extent performed by women.

Labour Market and Economy

During the post-war period, especially during the 50s and 60s, Sweden experienced favourable economic development, characterised by economic growth, steadily increasing employment and low and stable rates of unemployment. During this period Sweden had one of the highest labour market participation rates in the world. The public sector was built up gradually and a number of social reforms were implemented. Growing wealth was distributed relatively evenly amongst the population and Sweden was fortunate in not being involved in major crises and severe economic fluctuations.

However, this situation changed in the 70s and 80s. At the end of the 80s overheating of the Swedish economy led to a deep economic crisis with sinking production and growing unemployment as a consequence. Over three years - between 1991 and 1993 - employment rose from a low of 2 to 8 percent. In a very short time, around half a million jobs disappeared, mainly in industry and the building sector. This was followed by a contraction of the public sector with lay-offs and a reduction in the number of employees.

Unemployment remained for several years at around 8 percent which is in Swedish terms an unusually high level. Immigrants from outside the Nordic area and young persons, are groups who have been especially hard-hit. During 1998 and 1999, however, the labour market situation has showed improvement. Registered unemployment has declined significantly. This is

partly due to job creation but is also a result of an increase in the number of openings at municipal adult schools and institutions of higher education.

Unemployment together with other costs brought about by the financial crisis led to a deficit in state finances and a rapidly growing national debt. In order to deal with this, during the 90s the State has made deep cuts in spending, including cuts in grants to municipalities. Social insurance benefits have also been reduced. During 1998 and 1999, however, the Swedish economy has been successively strengthened and forecasts indicate continuing improvements. Because of the strengthened economy social insurance benefits in certain areas have been improved.

The economic crisis has imposed great strains on municipal finances. The municipalities have been forced to make major savings at the same time as the opportunities for increasing revenues through raising local taxes have been limited. In addition, demands on the municipalities have increased. Large cohorts of children and a tightening of legislation in the child care area imposed increasing demands on child care and the school coupled with increasing pressure from a growing number of elderly people on the social services. In order to square the circle, municipalities have reduced costs over a wide range of areas, not least in child and youth activities such as child care and the school.

Since 1997, however, the Swedish Riksdag has approved increases in central government grants to local governments. The higher grants were aimed at bringing an end to further cutbacks and instead creating scope for increased spending in such fields of local government responsibility as child and elderly care, schools and health care.

Households have also been affected by the economic crisis. Compared to other countries, Sweden is characterised by a relatively even distribution of income and wealth, partly due to the large role of the public sector. However, the economic crisis has led to a drastic decline in household income from gainful employment. Sweden's extensive social welfare safety net has gone a long way toward softening the effect of this loss in income. Despite this the economic crisis has imposed great strains on many households. The financial position of families with children has been particularly affected. Statistics show that financially weak households have been affected more than others - the distribution of incomes and wealth has become more uneven in Swedish society over the 90s.

New Family Patterns

Just a few decades ago, children in Sweden grew up in families quite different from today. Both the composition of families and their functions have changed. Mothers have entered the labour market, families have become smaller, many parents live together without being married and separations and divorces have become more common.

Historically it is not new that children grow up with only one parent. This was almost as common at the turn of the century as it is today. But whilst earlier this was due to high mortality rates that split families, today it is divorces. Getting divorced was unusual some way into the 60s, but is by no means unusual in Sweden today. Today nearly one in every fourth child has parents who have separated. However, it is important to bear in mind that the majority of children still live in traditional families. Approximately 75 percent of all children live with both parents and their full sisters and brothers.

A separated or divorced parent not living with his or her child, usually a father, normally lives close to and frequently meets the child. Around 50 percent of the children of separated or divorced parents meet their non-custodial parent every week and live no further than 10 km from the parent. 10 percent of the children of separated or divorced parents never meet their non-custodial parent. Children of separated parents live in single-parent families with their mother rather than in new families. They generally manage as well as other children in society. Maintenance support is given and paid at a rate of SEK 1 173 monthly from the local Social Insurance Office. Parents who are liable to pay maintenance repay the State an amount corresponding to maintenance support. This amount is based on income and quite independent of the custodial parent's income. Housing allowance, maintenance support and child allowance form a large part of the single parent's disposable income. Around 40 percent of the income of a single parent with two children derives from these benefits.

Another change is the increase in non-married cohabitation relationships. Men and women living together without being married has become increasingly common, not just in Sweden. But Sweden differs from many other countries in terms of the duration of such relationships. In many countries living together is often a "trial marriage" rapidly followed by marriage. In Sweden cohabitation has tended to develop as an alternative to marriage. Legislation making cohabitation equivalent to marriage has therefor been introduced to protect children. Some differences still exist though. Married parents automatically have joint custody of their children,

whilst unmarried parents must notify this. In Sweden 90 percent of parents in non-married cohabitation relationships and 45 percent of parents not living together have joint custody of their children.

The greatest change in recent decades concerns, however, not family composition but the fact that women are gainfully employed. The shortage of labour in the 70s meant that women entered the labour market much more than before. Also women with children of pre-school age took work outside the home. Since the 70s we have had completely different participation patterns for women. Whilst earlier it was unusual that a pre-school child had a mother out working, today this is close to being the norm. In 1965 two thirds of pre-school children had a mother who was not linked to the labour market, today the proportion is approximately one fifth.

This has resulted in female labour participation rates approximating ever more closely those of men. In 1970, 50 percent of Swedish women were in the labour force, compared to 85 percent of Swedish men. In 1998 this had changed to 74 percent for women and 79 percent for men. But, while only 6 percent of all Swedish men worked part-time (less than 35 hours per week), this was true for not less than 43 percent of women. (Tables 1-2).

Developments in Sweden have moved towards an equalisation of gender roles. Men and women share to a large extent responsibility for providing for the family, the home and children, at least to a greater extent than earlier generations. Development has been supported by changes in legislation and an expansion of child care. Separate income tax assessment for husbands and wives (as of 1971) has made it more profitable financially for women to work outside the home. Society has made great efforts to create a comprehensive support system for families with young children, a system designed to enable mothers and fathers to work outside the home, while at the same time feeling reassured that they could fulfil their roles as parents in a way which would give their children a good start in life.

The ideological shift toward more equal gender roles, has clearly not affected the behaviour of fathers as much as that of mothers, but some changes are noticeable: Almost three out of four fathers make use of the paid parental leave system during their child's first years, staying home to take care of the child for 50 days with parental cash-benefit. Mothers and fathers are sharing even more equally the right and responsibility of staying home and taking care of a sick child. Moreover, recent research shows that fathers are increasing their share of domestic work when it comes to spending time with the child and cooking.

Nevertheless, the step from theory to practice seems to be a long one for most Swedish men, since women are still doing most of the housework in addition to working outside the home. Given this situation, a part-time job might be more attractive for women than working 40 hours per week and then using up their remaining energy on shopping, cooking, and cleaning. We might have to wait until “equal rights and responsibilities” are lived up to in practice, but the changes that have taken place in the lives of Swedish families during the past generation are quite substantial. The “traditional Western family”, with mothers running the home and fathers as breadwinners, has almost disappeared in Sweden. It has been replaced not by one “post-industrial family”, but by several types of families, each with its own special strengths and weaknesses.

The Swedish Social Support System

Over the past fifty years, Sweden has developed publicly funded social welfare policies, which provide individuals and families with support in a variety of ways. Public social insurance and health care, free education, and a comprehensive system of support for families with young children are parts of these social welfare policies, financed by direct and indirect taxes and by contributions from employers and employees. Companies pay “employer taxes”, sometimes earmarked for certain social services, and a Swede working full-time pays an average of 30-40 percent in direct taxes on income. In addition, Sweden has an indirect, 23 percent state sales tax levied on goods and services.

The shape, content and financing of the Swedish social welfare system has been widely discussed by politicians, administrators, and parents since its inception, and discussions continue. For most of the period, there has been a majority in the Swedish Riksdag for policies favouring the idea that, although expensive, this comprehensive, social welfare system is a necessary prerequisite for the establishment of a society based on equality and a fair distribution of resources.

The aims of family financial support are to equalise living condition between households with and without children, to support parent’s in combining work outside home with family responsibilities and to give special support to families in vulnerable situations. As one of the results of family financial support, it can be mentioned that childhood poverty associated with family break-ups and absent fathers is, by international standards, practically non-existent in Sweden.

Shared parental responsibility for children in a family is an explicit goal of the Government. One of the best ways of supporting parents is by enabling both of them to be economically active. The majority of families with children in Sweden have two incomes. It is also common that single parents work. Developing benefits that encourage and make this possible is consequently very important. Parental income is the main pillar of the family economy, hence the great importance of developing systems that encourage work and make gainful employment possible for both parents.

The expanding public child care program is part of that system, as is the paid parental leave program, child allowances, state guaranteed child maintenance to single parents, housing allowances, and other state support directed specifically toward families with children. Other important support systems include free prenatal care for pregnant women, and regular check-ups in child health clinics during the pre-school period for all children, systems which have helped to make Sweden the nation with one of the lowest infant mortality rates in the world. Some of these supports, like monthly child allowances, prenatal care, or free meals in the schools, are granted to all families with children. Others, such as income-related housing allowances, or priority rights to places in public child care for children in need of special support, are based on specific needs of individuals or groups of families.

Parental insurance includes three different cash-benefits, pregnancy benefit, parental insurance in connection with childbirth or adoption (paid parental leave) and temporary parental benefit. Parental insurance was established in 1974 as a modification of the maternity leave program of 1937 and it has been expanded step-wise since then. Parental cash benefit in connection with childbirth, or paid parental leave, is available today for a period of 450 days, which according to legislation is divided equally between parents, so they both have the right to take on the task. However, parents may transfer their days with each other, except for the 30 day period called “mother’s and father’s month”. The parent taking care of a child receives a financial benefit from the state amounting to 80 percent of his or her salary over 360 days, and a flat-rate benefit of SEK 60 a day for 90 days. To qualify for this, the parent must have been employed for at least six months prior to the birth of the child. Paid parental leave can be used flexibly. It applies until the child is eight years of age or finishes the first year at school. The benefit can be used for either whole or part days. The majority of parents, however, choose to use most of these days during the child’s early years.

A pregnancy benefit of 80 percent of salary is paid to expectant mothers with employment who are unable to go on working from 60 to 11 days before “due date”.

The mother's and the father's month in the paid parental leave system was introduced in 1995 with the aim of increasing the use fathers make of the parental cash benefit and to encourage fathers to share in taking care of their child. Father's use of the benefit has increased by ten percent since the introduction of the father's month and is now some 70 percent. The mother's and father's month has clearly contributed in a positive way to fathers use of the parental cash-benefit. The proportion of benefit days used by father's has increased steadily from three percent when this option was first introduced in 1974 to ten percent in 1998. The National Board of Social Security has run several advertising and information campaigns over the years to emphasise the importance of both parents participating in the care of their children. Written material is distributed to all fathers emphasising the importance of early and close contact between father and child. All parents are invited to information meetings about parental insurance before having their child.

Temporary parental allowance entitles parents to a generous 120 days leave of absence from work on 80 percent salary, to take care of a sick child at home up to the age of twelve. The average number of days used for this purpose is only seven days a year per child. These days are more equally distributed between fathers and mothers. Fathers accounted for around 32 percent of all days used in 1998. This option works well for the dual breadwinner family, and enables both parents to combine having a family with work outside home. A father is also entitled to ten days temporary parental benefit in connection with the birth of his child. These days are supposed to be used to welcome and take care of the new child and the other children in the family when a new child is born. Almost all fathers make use of the ten "daddy days".

Since the option of parental leave for fathers was introduced, fathers have taken a more active paternal role.

In overall terms, the paid parental leave program has almost eliminated family infant child care outside the home in Sweden. Since most parents make use of their right to stay home with pay to take care of their babies from birth to 12 months, they thus remove the pressure on municipalities to provide public child care outside the homes for these children.

III. THE SWEDISH ECEC

Historical Roots

From a historical perspective, public child care is a fairly recent phenomenon in Sweden. The first infant creche was opened in 1854, but for more than a century the number of available places in centres was very limited. In 1935 about 4 000 children had a place in a creche. The main purpose of these early programs was to provide inexpensive care to poor children whose mothers worked outside the home. These creches were usually organised and run by foundations or private organisations, and based on charity. In 1944, when limited public support was introduced, the term was changed from “creche” to “day care centre”, and the National Board of Health and Welfare became the new supervisory authority.

In the early stages, the major objective of the day care centres was to care for the children of single mothers, as an alternative to placement in foster homes. Care in foster homes, where children were removed from their mothers and placed to live in a new family, was gradually replaced by care in foster day care homes, or family day care homes, where the children spent weekdays in the home of a family day care mother, but continued to live with their biological parents.

Foster homes, day care centres, and family day care homes were linked by a common objective. They were intended to provide care for children of single parents, and their presence was based on social political considerations. Reforms aimed at alleviating poverty were the primary political goals during the first six decades of the century, and in this respect the development of a public child care program was only a small piece of a much larger puzzle. Direct financial support to all families with children, paid in the form of child allowances, is an example of a reform more in line with the political aspirations of that period.

The links to social policy were made quite clear when the National Child Care Commission presented the results of its efforts in 1949. Attitudes toward public child care were hesitant, and only social reasons, such as support for single mothers, were accepted as justification for expansion of the system.

A different type of full-day institution was developed alongside the creches, albeit on a small scale. The first infant-schools, started in 1836, had specific pedagogical goals in addition to social motives. These infant-schools were

few in number and were transformed eventually into creches. Their educational program was similar to those developed somewhat later in another parallel form of “child care”, the kindergarten.

The first kindergarten in Sweden was started in 1890, with an educational program based on the ideas about children’s development and learning of the German pedagogue Friedrich Fröbel. Central to Fröbel’s pedagogical system for working with small children was the emphasis on children’s play. Play provided children with opportunities to experience and construct their outer and inner worlds, and playing was seen as the child’s tool to true development.

But Fröbel also stressed that kindergartens were only to be seen as complements to the home and the family, and children were only supposed to spend parts of their days in these pedagogical settings. Part-time kindergartens represented a stimulating addition to home care, rather than alternatives emanating from social policy considerations. They were used mainly by families with above average financial resources, where mothers were not working outside the home.

It is worth pointing out, however, that the kindergarten movement was not only to be regarded as a service to children from the upper and middle classes. In the period 1904-1930 Public Kindergartens recruited children from socially disadvantaged families, in an attempt to “teach the children of the poor the importance of saving, contentment, and good taste”. This form of social work grew out of a wish to dampen growing class conflicts following the rapid process of industrialisation and urbanisation.

To some extent, the pedagogical system designed by Fröbel has had to compete with the more structured, goal-oriented and work-based ideas introduced at the turn of the century by Maria Montessori. Montessori-based programs continue to operate in Sweden, but on a small scale.

Modern Times - A National Strategy for ECEC

Yesterday’s creches, foster homes, day care centres, kindergartens, and play-schools had different roots and purposes. In 1968 the National Commission on Child Care, was commissioned by the Government to submit proposals on how child care integrating pedagogical, social and supervisory elements could be developed in Sweden. Demands for the expansion of child care had become more vehement, there was a great need for labour and the claims of the women’s movement at that time for equality and democracy through participation in working and societal life on the same conditions as men were becoming more widely accepted.

The Commission worked for four years before presenting its report titled “The Pre-school”. Under the direction of Mr. Ingvar Carlsson, who later became Prime Minister of Sweden, the Commission, with the assistance of numerous experts, carried out a full-scale review, organisationally, pedagogically and ideologically. The Commission’s work was highly influential in developing public child care over the coming decades.

The Commission concluded in its report to the Government that the old views of care as poverty relief and pedagogical activity as stimulation for children of better-off parents could be brought together into a single form to provide education and care for all children. This would be called “pre-school”, irrespective of whether it was provided full-time or part-time. Children of mixed age groups (1-3 and 3-6 years) would replace groups based on age “streaming” as happened in the day care centres earlier, so that children could learn from each other, find playmates of different ages and levels of development. It was also claimed that children in need of special support could be integrated into the ordinary child groups as opposed to special institutions and solutions as happened earlier. Personnel working in teams providing democratic models for children, recognising and validating each child and pre-school teachers also for children of 1-3 years, have all become permanent principles of child care. The Commission recommended that the development of the pre-school should be built principally on centre-based forms and that co-operation with parents should be a central feature. The pedagogical approach recommended was that of the pre-school, which was based on a dialogue between the teacher and the child, the child having great freedom to choose material, themes and activities and where the teacher’s role was to provide support and stimulation to fulfil the needs of the child. At that time this represented a new way of thinking about the child’s development and learning processes. The child’s self-esteem and independence were important goals to be nurtured.

The 1975 National Pre-school Act that followed imposed upon the local authorities the task of systematically expanding public child care and to provide an official report of their plans. In addition, municipalities were required to provide all 6 year olds with at least 525 hours of free pre-schooling. Children needing special support should have priority in pre-school activities from an early age. The public pre-school, even though voluntary, has in practice served all 6 year olds from its introduction.

The national strategy for ECEC, which was politically defined and specified in the early 70s has since then, with some gradual modifications, been followed and implemented during the past three decades. Stable

parliamentary support, during most of this period, for government proposals in the child care and family support areas, have made possible the fulfilment of the goals implied in this national strategy. These goals might be presented as follows:

- Providing ECEC of high quality should be seen as a task for society.
- ECEC should provide children with stimulating and developing activities, combine education and care, and ensure good living conditions for the children. The relationship between parents and ECEC should be one of close co-operation.
- ECEC should be directed toward all children, with particular responsibility for children in need of special support.
- ECEC should be organised in such a way as to allow parents to combine parenthood with work or studies and should be made available in, and made part of, the neighbourhoods in which the families live.
- It should be the responsibility of the municipalities to provide and publicly fund ECEC, with additional fees collected from parents within reasonable limits.
- Municipalities should plan for and carry out the expansion of the child care system until the point of full coverage has been reached.

In 1985 the Swedish Riksdag voted in support of a proposal by the Social Democratic Government that by 1991 all children between 1.5 - 6 years old would have the right to a place in public child care, as long as their parents worked or studied. This principal decision could be looked upon as a political attempt to reduce the long waiting-lists still in operation in many municipalities.

The “baby-boom” around the 90s, coupled with an increasing number of mothers wanting to work outside their homes, put a heavy burden on state and municipal budgets. Studies in the 80s showed, however, that public investments in child care, allowing more women to work outside the home, generated a positive financial net effect on the national economy. But, despite the addition of a large number of child care places, new children kept appearing on child care waiting-lists, placed there by hopeful parents who wanted to work or study, and at the same time benefit from publicly funded child care of high quality, rather than relying on more unstable, privately financed solutions, such as unlicensed day care mothers found through advertisements on the bulletin board at the local food store.

In January 1995 new legislation came into force, which in a complete departure with earlier approaches, specified the obligations of the municipalities to supply pre-school activities and child care. In the earlier legislation, the municipalities were obliged in their expansion plans to satisfy the need for child care. Now, however, the municipalities were obliged to provide child care, without unreasonable delay for children aged between 1-12 years, whose parents were working or studying or if the child had a special need for child care.

In a follow-up study, conducted by the National Agency for Education in 1998, more than 95 percent of all municipalities (275) stated that they were now able to offer a place in child care “without unreasonable delay”, defined as “within 3-4 months” after application.

To summarise the present situation, the vast majority of Swedish children, 1-12 years old, now have a place in publicly funded child care of some sort, be it pre-schools, family day care homes or leisure-time centres. It seems accurate to argue that the national child care program has now expanded to a situation when “full coverage” in accordance with legislation has been reached. As a consequence of the expansion of ECEC for pre-school age children, the need for school-age child care also increased rapidly. The number of 6-12 years old children spending time in public leisure-time centres, outside school-hours, has increased rapidly during the past ten years.

Hitherto, however, the definition of “full coverage” had been linked more to the right of parents to work or study than to right of children to a place in child care. The Swedish ECEC-system has been regarded as part of a more general family support system, and a prerequisite for equality between men and women, and supportive living-conditions for children. It was also clearly linked to the needs of the labour market.

Even though the needs of children have been clearly in focus, also during the expansion period, manifested in well-educated personnel or the 1987 Educational Program for Pre-schools, the shift of government responsibilities from the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs to the Ministry of Education and Science, reflects a desire to further emphasise the educational focus of ECEC-settings and to facilitate the integration of child care and school systems.

Public child care is now a part of the educational system, and the first curriculum for pre-schools (Lpfö 98) came into effect in August, 1998. In addition, the National Agency for Education is preparing supplementary guides for family day care and open pre-schools. This does not mean, however, that

the links to the Swedish family support system have been cut off. The structure and function of the ECEC will continue to be important for the welfare of Swedish families with young children.

Existing Forms

Child care in Sweden covers both children of pre-school age and children attending school. Compulsory school starts in Sweden when children are seven years old. According to the School Act the municipalities are obliged to provide child care for children aged between 1-12 years to the extent needed taking account of whether parents are employed or studying as well as the child's own needs. The School Act also contains a classification of the different forms of pre-school activities (*förskoleverksamhet*) and school-age child care (*skolbarnsomsorg*) activities.

- Pre-school activities are intended for children who have not yet started school, i.e. in practice children aged between 1-5 years. There are three different types of pre-school activities - pre-schools, family day care homes, and open pre-schools (*förskola, familjedaghem, öppen förskola*).
- School-age child care is for children up to the age of 12 who have started school and covers leisure-time centres, family day care homes and open leisure-time activities (*fritidshem, familjedaghem, öppen fritidsverksamhet*).

As of 1998, six year-olds have their own - voluntary - school form, the pre-school class. This is a part of the school system and thus not regarded as child care.

Pre-school

Pre-school offers fulltime care and education for pre-school age children whose parents work or study, or for children judged to be in "need of special support". Children are enrolled and parents pay a fee decided on by the municipalities. Pre-schools are in general open throughout the year with daily opening hours adjusted to the working hours of parents. A majority of the personnel have a pre-school teacher's qualification. The pre-school has had its own curriculum (Lpfö 98) since 1998 which serves to emphasise its pedagogical importance.

The pre-school (formerly day care centre) has been successively expanded to serve an increasingly larger proportion of children. In 1998, there were 338 000 children in Swedish pre-schools, which corresponds to 61 percent of all children aged between 1-5 years.

Earlier the so-called day care centre and part-time group were designated as two different pre-school forms in the legislation. Day-care centres, which provided child care throughout the day, has been the dominant form over a long period, whilst part-time groups have primarily taken care of six year-olds. On 1st August 1998 the terms "day care centre" and "part-time groups" were removed from the School Act leaving the single category "pre-school". This change coincides with the introduction of the pre-school class.

Family day care homes

In public family day care homes, the municipal family child minder takes care of children in her own home, while the parents are working or studying. The children spend varying parts of the day in the family day care home, sometimes this includes evenings or weekends if parent working-schedules include "odd hours". Children are enrolled and parents pay a fee decided on by the municipality. The Curriculum of the pre-school does not apply to family day care homes, but should serve as a guide. During 1999 The National Agency for Education will issue its General guidelines for family day care homes.

Family day care homes mainly serve children of pre-school ages. They have declined steadily in numbers since the end of the 80s. In 1998 there were about 15 000 family day care homes in operation in Sweden, serving 61 000 pre-school aged children and 21 000 school-age children. This corresponds to 12 percent of all children aged between 1-5 years and 4 percent of all children aged between 6-9 years.

Open pre-school

Open pre-schools are available to those pre-school aged children, who are not enrolled in other forms of public child care, accompanied by their parents. They provide opportunities for parents to meet other parents in the same situation, while their children interact with playmates. The settings also provide opportunities for family day care mothers to get together and share their experiences, or to ask the pre-school teacher for advice. Parents or family child minders are not required to sign up for participation in the open pre-school, but they must stay and participate. The open pre-school is free of charge. The number of open pre-schools has gradually decreased during the 90s, from 1 600 in 1990 to about 1 000 in 1997.

In some areas open pre-schools have changed into what might be called family resource centres, where social workers, child health nurses and pre-school teachers are working together with social prevention and health care activities.

The curriculum of the pre-school does not apply to the open pre-school. During 1999 The National Agency for Education will issue its General guidelines for these pre-schools.

Leisure-time centres and open leisure-time activities

Leisure-time centres are open to school children whose parents are working or studying or for children judged to be in "need of special support". Children enrolled spend those parts of the day when they are not in pre-school class or primary school in the leisure-time centre, which is often located in the primary school building. They might also attend during school holidays. Children are enrolled and just as in the pre-school and family day care centre, parents pay a fee decided on by the municipalities.

Leisure-time centres have been expanded very rapidly during the 90s due in part to the fact that many six-year olds now attend leisure-time centres. In 1998 enrolments numbered 300 000, corresponding to 56 percent of all children aged between 6-9 years and 7 percent of all children aged between 10-12 years.

Care and education in leisure-time centres are closely linked both to ECEC and the compulsory school system. Pedagogical perspectives, content and working-methods applied in leisure-time centres by university-trained leisure-time teachers developed over a long period of time in close co-operation with pre-school education and care. Since the second half of the 80s, it has become increasingly common that schools and leisure-time centres have developed close working-relationships. This development has been intensified during the 90s, for pedagogical, organisational and financial reasons. Many leisure-time centres have now moved into school buildings and integration and co-operation with the schools is frequently found.

As a complement to leisure-time centres, there are open leisure-time activities (*öppen fritidsverksamhet*) for children aged between 10-12 years. Children attending are not usually enrolled. This form has not undergone much development and only exists in 25 percent of all municipalities.

The pre-school class

Since 1998 the municipalities have been obliged to provide all six-year olds with a place in the pre-school class (*förskoleklass*) for at least 525 hours. The pre-school class is a voluntary school form for children and free of charge, but obligatory for municipalities to arrange. Education in the pre-school class is aimed at stimulating each child's development and learning and to provide a basis for further schooling. The nationally applied curriculum for

compulsory schools (Lpo94) has been adjusted to include the pre-school class. The main reason for introducing the pre-school class as a voluntary part of the school system is to facilitate integration between pre-school and compulsory school. In principle all six-year olds who have not started compulsory school attend the pre-school class.

The pre-school class has replaced the obligation which municipalities have had since the 70s to provide six year olds with free pre-schooling for at least 525 hours. Many six year olds attended this number of hours in the day care centre, others in the part-time group. At the beginning of the 90s, it became increasingly common to arrange special part-time groups for six year olds. Children who needed more care than the three hours provided by these groups also attended a family day care home or leisure-time centre.

The introduction of the pre-school class thus means that the pre-school as of 1998 serves children aged between 1-5 years instead of as earlier children aged between 1-6 years. At the same time the leisure-time centres receive more and more six year olds. Children needing care throughout the day usually go to a leisure-time centre before or after attending the pre-school class.

Expansion and Current Level of Coverage

As mentioned before, child care in Sweden has been expanded very rapidly. Between the years 1970 and 1998, the number of children participating in full-time child care, i.e. pre-school, leisure-time centre and family day care centre increased from 71 000 to 720 000, more than a tenfold increase. (Table 3)

Expansion has accelerated over the 90s. New legislation obliges municipalities to arrange places for children who need it and large cohorts of children led to a record number of new places in the middle of the 90s. Most recently, however, the number of children in the pre-school has declined, especially since six year olds have left the pre-school, but also because of a declining birth rate. This is the first time since the major expansion started in the 60s that there has been a decline in the number of children in the pre-school. Leisure-time centres have, however, continued to increase so that between the years 1991 and 1998, there was a threefold increase in the number of children enrolled in leisure-time centres.

Expansion has meant that an increasingly larger proportion of children in Sweden have access to public child care. At the end of 1998, 73 percent of all children in the 1-5 age group were enrolled in a pre-school or a family

day care centre and 58 percent of all 6-9 year olds were enrolled in school-age child care. In principle all six year olds attend either the pre-school class (91 percent) or the compulsory school (7 percent). (Tables 4-6)

In Sweden, infants under the age of one are taken care of by one of their parents at home, supported by the paid parental leave program. Statistics indicate that only about 200 children in this age group were enrolled in public child care in 1997.

Children are not enrolled at the open pre-schools and there is no information on how many children attend. National statistics only contain information on the number of open pre-schools and their opening hours.

Regional differences

Regional differences are relatively great. Towns, suburban municipalities and the largest cities - municipalities with high female labour market participation rates - have the highest proportion of children in child care, whilst rural municipalities have the lowest.

The distribution of EEC-activities also varies between different types of municipalities. Family day care centres are much more common in sparsely populated areas and rural municipalities than in large city regions, whilst the opposite holds true for pre-schools and leisure-time centres. In 1998, for example, 20 percent of children in rural municipalities aged between 1-5 years were enrolled in family day care homes compared to 6 percent of the children in large cities. At the same time, 46 percent of 1-5 year olds in rural municipalities attended pre-school compared to 69 percent of children in large cities. The pattern is the same for school-age child care.

Non-municipal ECEC

Contained in the figures presented in the appendices are those ECEC-settings which are non-municipal, although publicly financed. These alternatives have become more common during the 90s, and in 1998, 44 000 children, or 13 percent of all children enrolled in pre-schools, had a place in a setting that was not run by a municipality.

An additional 15 000 children attended private leisure-time centres.

The main principle that it is the responsibility of society to satisfy the need for child care has not prevented legislation from gradually creating opportunities for parties other than the municipalities to provide pre-school and leisure-time activities. There is broad consensus that alternative models

for child care can be enriching and developmental and also that it is important for freedom of choice and accessibility that activities are run in different forms and with different approaches.

There has also been widespread agreement that alternatives, should, however, not segregate children into first and second team pre-schools. The legislation allows municipalities to outsource the running of pre-school and leisure-time-centres providing the financial conditions are the same for municipally and non-municipally run forms. This means that municipalities when issuing a permit are also obliged to provide the same municipal grant to non-municipally and municipally-run activities and that the parental fees should be the same.

The most common of these settings are parental co-operatives, which by tradition have most experience in providing alternatives in Swedish child care. This form of ECEC is privately organised by groups of parents, but subsidised by the municipality in the same way as publicly run centres. Parental groups are the organiser and employ the personnel. Parents often themselves work on a rotating basis and are thus able to reduce costs. Many parental co-operatives were started by parents full of initiative wanting to bypass the long waiting times for places in municipal pre-school during its expansion years, and despite the fact that there is now full coverage they continue to flourish. Parental involvement and participation are the cornerstones in this type of child care and the number of settings exceeded 1 000 in 1998. Other non-publicly organised ECEC-settings include personnel co-operatives, and on a smaller scale, programs organised by various organisations, corporations or churches.

Non-municipally organised ECEC is unevenly distributed across the country and most often found in the larger cities. These settings have to meet the standards of public child care, and are also entitled to public tax funds to cover their running costs. Parental fees are not allowed to deviate from municipal norms, and privately organised programs have to follow the same basic ideological principles and fundamental values as stated in the national curriculum, such as democracy, equality and solidarity.

Division of Responsibility between the State and Municipalities

From the mid 80s there has been an explicit trend in administration policy in Sweden to give the local authorities greater responsibility and self-determination.. The division of roles and responsibility between central government and local authorities has gradually changed, as a result of amongst other things changes in the Local Government Act of 1991 and a

new a grant system. The state lays down goals and guidelines for the activities of municipalities and at the same time sets the financial framework. It is thus the municipalities themselves who determine how they will fulfil the national goals and how they will use the funds allocated. The shift from a rule-oriented steering system to a more goal-directed system has also placed more responsibilities with the professionals working in the ECEC-settings, which demands a highly qualified personnel staff.

There are currently 289 municipalities in Sweden. The tasks of the local government sector fall into two distinct categories: those included in the general power granted to municipalities under the Local Government Act (1991), such as streets and roads, water and sewage, communications and transportation, and those based on special legislation, for instance child care, schools and social services. Education is by far the largest sector of municipal operations, accounting for about 1/3 of the costs. In 1998 total child care costs amounted to about half of the total education costs.

Swedish local administration is supervised by elected representatives. Every municipality has a decision-making body called the municipal council. The people directly elect the members of this council every four years at general elections (the same day as the parliamentary election). The councils establish goals and guidelines for local government operations and also approve the budget.

Direct local income tax is the main source of revenue for municipalities. Local government is normally entitled to set its own tax rates. In 1999 these varied from a low of 27,0 percent of taxable income to a high of 34,4 percent, with an average rate of 32,1 percent. As a supplement to this, local governments receive a state grant, of dual character, consisting of pure grants as well as tax and structural equalisation. Since 1993, about 75 percent of total state grants are in the form of block grants, to give municipalities greater freedom to decide locally how to spend the money.

Responsibility for ECEC

The Riksdag and the Government set up the overall national goals and guidelines for Swedish ECEC. The rules are set out in the School Act, in the curriculum or other ordinances. The national supervisory authority (The National Agency for Education), which since 1998 has been the same as for the school, monitors that the national goals are fulfilled and contributes to development through follow-up, evaluation, development and supervision.

The municipalities are responsible for providing pre-school activities and child care and that children are offered this. They are also responsible for

quality and allocating necessary resources, for example in terms of personnel and premises. The municipalities also decide on how the goals and guidelines should be made concrete in order to fulfil needs of the municipality. The personnel plan and implement activities for individual groups of children together with parents on the basis of state and local goals and guidelines.

Today the degree of central control has declined. It was significantly stronger during the initial decades of the expansion of Swedish ECEC. In order to guarantee high and even quality, the National Board of Health and Welfare issued recommendations and guidelines on i.a. premises, educational qualifications of personnel, personnel ratios, size of groups and contents of the pedagogical activity. State grants were used to stimulate expansion and to steer activities in the desired direction. Nationally initiated programs like special “mother tongue” education for immigrant children or open pre-schools for parents and children in families where parents did not work outside the home, are examples of areas that have been encouraged through state grants. As a result, child care services were fairly uniform and of high quality, everywhere in the country. Today local variations are more common.

Changes have also taken place within the municipalities in the direction of increased decentralisation and the use of new steering and operational approaches. For example, a director in child care has significantly greater administrative and financial responsibilities compared with earlier.

IV. POLICY CONCERNS

Quality

The School Act of 1998, stipulates that the municipalities are obliged to provide pre-school activities of high quality. In pre-school settings, there should be personnel present with the appropriate educational background or experience to satisfy children's need for care and education. The size and composition of the groups of children should be appropriate and the settings should be suitable for their purposes. Activities should be based on the individual needs of each child.

Issues linked to quality and equivalence in ECEC have received increased importance during the past decades. One reason for this has been the changes in steering and supervisory mechanisms which have taken place on national as well as local levels. Earlier the dominant model within the public sector was based on centrally formulated rules, regulations, and guidelines aimed at guaranteeing ECEC-programs of high and uniform quality, and was enforced through the system of state grants. The past fifteen years have seen an increase in decentralisation of decisions from national to local level, manifested in the 1991 Local Government Act, which provides a framework to strengthen local democracy.

Different Types of Quality Definitions

There are many different ways of defining and measuring quality within the ECEC-arena. One of the most common definitions might be referred to as structural quality, and takes as its point of departure the frameworks and prerequisites of ECEC-activities, often expressed in objectively measurable variables such as size and composition of children's groups, adult/child ratios or educational level of the personnel. Factors linked to physical design of settings or outdoor-environments might also be included among structural variables of interest. In Sweden, annual statistics, gathered systematically at the national level, give a good picture of changes over time in group-sizes, adult/child ratios, personnel education, etc. Such statistics have been available since the 60s.

During the 90s, productivity in Swedish ECEC, measured in costs per hour, has increased substantially. The number of children in ECEC-settings, and in school-age child care, increased by about 30 percent, whereas total costs

remained the same. During the same period, changes in a number of structural variables were observed. The number of children in an average pre-school group increased from 13.8 in 1990 to 16.6 in 1998. There was also an increase in the number of children per adult from 4.2 to 5.6, during the period. The percentage of family day care homes with more than six children increased from 35 to 44 percent between 1991 and 1998.

These changes have raised the issue of whether municipalities are able to maintain a quality level which meets the requirements stipulated in the School Act, in relation to good care and education based on the needs of each individual child.

The National Board of Health and Welfare identified some years ago ten particularly important areas to consider when evaluating quality in ECEC. Size and composition of the groups of children, adult/child ratios, and the educational level and competence of personnel and directors are factors of vital importance for activities in ECEC-settings. Continuity in the groups of children and personnel is a prerequisite for forming good relationships and well-functioning work-teams.

Other important prerequisites might be linked to how well steering and guiding, as well as co-operation and interactions between different levels in the organisation are functioning. The physical environment, i.e. facilities and areas for play, is also identified as an important factor, as are various health, nutrition and safety factors.

In the final report "Children's Living Conditions in Times of Change 1994", the National Board of Health and Welfare concluded that the general quality level in Swedish ECEC was high, but that there was a growing number of municipalities that displayed shortcomings within certain important quality areas. These findings were some of the reasons for the inclusion in 1995 of a special "quality-paragraph" in Swedish ECEC-legislation.

On a national level, no representative evaluations of quality have been conducted during the past few years. This is why it is unclear if, and how quality of ECEC-activities might have been affected by municipal budget cuts. The fact that cutbacks have started from a comparably high quality level has, of course, been an advantage, just as the high educational level and competence among the personnel has been a guarantee for a high level of professionalism when circumstances have changed. Pedagogically justified developmental work, such as integration between schools and school-age child care have also made activities in this area economically more efficient.

Research has shown that there is no clear-cut relationship between costs and quality. However, studies investigating these relationships have also shown, that socially disadvantaged groups of children suffer more from a deterioration in ECEC structural quality, than children from families with more resources. Solidarity goals, and equal rights to good quality ECEC are issues highlighted in these types of quality discussions.

In a recent report, the National Agency for Education stresses the importance of being particularly observant on quality in ECEC-activities for the youngest children, for children in need of special support, and in the work focusing on multicultural groups of children.

A different way of defining quality takes as its starting point the parents using the ECEC-system, in their roles as citizens, clients or “customers”. Quality of services now becomes the main focus of interest. In measuring quality of services, issues that could be focused on cover full coverage, efficient administration and distribution of places, access, opening hours or parental freedom to choose among different ECEC-alternatives.

National and local child-care surveys, conducted regularly, have until recently provided politicians and administrators with information on parental needs and preferences in these respects. During the past decade, municipalities have also systematically been using “consumer-surveys” as ways of measuring parental levels of satisfaction with existing ECEC-activities, thus relying on subjective quality ratings based on parental norms or preferences of what might be important aspects of ECEC-programs.

High level of access, or availability of alternative forms of ECEC-programs, might be defined as high quality of results linked to service-level. Other result-focused quality definitions might be more geared towards measuring effects of education and care activities on children’s development and learning. The goals presented in the National Curriculum specify the desired quality targets in the pre-schools. Evaluating capacities, competencies or developmental progress of individual children, are responsibilities to be carried out by ECEC-personnel in co-operation with the child’s parents.

Quality might also be defined and evaluated in relation to pedagogical processes. Process quality refers to the quality of activities and relationships in the ECEC-settings. High process quality calls for well-functioning relationships among personnel and children, and carefully planned activities, systematically analysed and evaluated. Mutually trusting relationships among personnel and parents have also been found to be important.

Measurement of processes has been conducted, for example, with the use of the internationally well-known ECERS-scale, adapted to Swedish circumstances. This scale is based on summary evaluations of characteristic educational and care situations in pre-schools. The physical, social, and educational aspects of ECEC-settings are evaluated from the perspectives of the children, and quality is defined as the degree of awareness among the personnel when it comes to creating a supportive environment for the care and education of the children. Swedish research has found high quality, as defined by the ECERS-scale, to be closely linked to parental feelings of trust, involvement, and understanding of the norms, values and working-methods of the personnel in the ECEC-settings.

Different forms of evaluation and quality reporting have also been developed in Sweden. In the Swedish pre-school, as in other Nordic countries, there has been a growing interest in recent years in using pedagogical documentation as a tool for developing pedagogical work. In this context mentioned can be made of the municipal pre-schools in Reggio Emilia in Italy, which have served as an important model and source of inspiration. Swedish networks have been created by pre-schools working on pedagogical documentation to better understand the child's learning processes and provide a platform for co-operation, reflection and communication, between teachers themselves and together with children, parents and other interested parties from outside the pre-school. Documentation in the form of text, videos, photos, slides and the child's own work makes it possible to follow, interpret and reflect on the child's thoughts and ideas. The teacher, as a reflecting practitioner, through pedagogical documentation tries to make the child's learning processes explicit and accessible for evaluating the quality of the work. The Reggio-Emilia Institute in Stockholm provides in-service training and arranges study visits in close co-operation with Italy and also carries out research and development work along these lines.

A subjective, and relativistic approach to the definition of quality might use as a starting point the position that what should be considered high quality in an ECEC-activity should have grown out of discussions among groups or individuals involved in the activity, i.e. parents, pre-school teachers, children and local directors. Definitions of quality now become a continuing process among various stakeholders, a dynamic concept linked to a specific context, situation or time-span. Using this perspective, ECEC-activities are difficult to define and measure for quality, since the meaning of the concept will constantly shift through stakeholder negotiations.

From a different perspective, high quality might be defined through general knowledge based on research and experience. This knowledge about what characterises a good developmental environment for children might be transferred into overarching goals, as in the curriculum for pre-schools, and evaluated for quality in relation to those goals. Objective or absolute as it might be, this definition will not be static or unchangeable. New knowledge and experiences will constantly be added, to revise and test this definition of quality.

To improve process quality, resources might be well spent on continuing education of ECEC-personnel. One example of such an attempt to indirectly improve pedagogical processes is the ongoing, nation-wide program to implement the new curriculum, financed through the National Agency for Education. Pre-school teachers, primary school teachers and leisure-time pedagogues meet to discuss fundamental values, goal definitions, and guidelines presented in the curriculum in co-operation with university teachers and researchers. In basic university-level teacher training, courses on research methods and evaluation have recently been added to the program, to meet the increased demands for systematic analyses and evaluations of activities in the ECEC-settings.

There is an ongoing discussion among ECEC-stakeholders in Sweden as to definitions and measurements of ECEC-quality. Researchers and ECEC-professionals might address the issue of quality from the perspective of expert groups that are likely to know what constitutes an optimal environment for children's development and learning. "High or Low" quality is related to absolute standards and defined goals. Parents might look at quality from a different angle, including flexible opening hours, affordable fees and the particular interests of personnel. Municipalities trying to adapt a "consumer-perspective" or a cost-reducing "lowest acceptable quality" perspective, might prefer a more subjective and relativistic "Right or Wrong" quality definition.

The National Agency for Education acknowledges the fact that factors linked to process-quality in ECEC-settings are particularly difficult to define and measure, and that data on the national level are hard to collect. Developing reliable evaluation methods is hence considered to be an area of high priority in the years to follow.

Access

Current level of coverage

The majority of municipalities in Sweden today can fulfil their obligations under the School Act to provide places in pre-schools, leisure-time centres and family day care homes without unreasonably long waiting periods. In the follow-up carried out by National Agency for Education in Spring 1998, 275 municipalities or 95 percent stated that they provide places for pre-school children after a maximum of three to four months waiting period. For school children the proportion was still higher - 98 per cent.

As noted earlier, the expansion of the Swedish ECEC-system has been linked both to parental working status and to the needs of the children. With 73 percent of all children 1-5 years of age, now in pre-schools or family day care groups (90 percent, if parents are working or studying), the Swedish system is close to "full coverage". From a quantitative perspective, access must be defined as high, especially since "pre-school" is not a compulsory form of education and care. Information from 1996 showed that most pre-school children who was not enrolled in public child care had a parent home on parental leave with a baby (11 percent). The second largest groups were thus made up of children whose parents were gainfully employed or studying without using public child care (8 percent) and children of unemployed parents (6 percent). A smaller group (2 percent) had one parent running the home.

Access might also be discussed under headings other than proportion of children enrolled. Children in need of special support deserves such a heading, since providing access for this group is particularly emphasised in the School Act as a mandatory responsibility for municipalities in Sweden.

Children in Need of Special Support

Some children might be in need of special support for reasons linked to physical, psychological, social, or emotional factors. These needs might be of a more permanent or temporary nature and call for special attention, support or understanding from adults in the ECEC-settings. Many refugee children belong to this group. In the period between 1990-1995, more than 40 000 refugee children, age 1-6, arrived in Sweden. Language problems, or psychosocial problems in this group of children often call for special support.

Municipalities have a special responsibility for children in need of special support, and have to offer a place in ECEC-settings to all such children, regardless of whether the parents are working or not. Most often this offer means a place in a pre-school group, but sometimes a qualified family day care home might be the preferred choice, i.e. if the child is severely allergic or sensitive to infections. Children in need of special support are entitled to a daily three hour session in pre-school, free of charge, throughout the whole of their childhood.

Integration, or mainstreaming, are the guiding principles for provision of special support in Sweden. Pre-schools or family day care homes are not “special treatment” institutions, but rather normal, every-day life settings. Integration of children in need of special support calls for careful planning of daily activities and relationships in such a way as to allow all children to participate in daily routines, structured circle-time sessions or free-play activities with peers and adults. Sometimes there might be a need for additional support personnel, at other times reducing the number of children in an ECEC-group might be a better way of creating a particularly supportive environment.

Recent studies report that more than 90 percent of all municipalities have certain funds earmarked for children in need of special support. Most municipalities also have routines for placement, follow-up and action plans for pre-school age children in need of special support. However, only about half the municipalities have specific goal documents, and when such documents exist they are often highly generalised and not linked to funding or resources.

Children in Hospitals

Access to education and care equivalent to pre-school services should also be made available to children in hospitals. Those in charge of the institution are responsible for ensuring that such opportunities are offered to the children. Play therapy is available in paediatric departments of Swedish hospitals. Here, personnel with pre-school and special education qualifications provide the children with developmentally stimulating activities, prepare them for medical examinations and treatments, and try to explain what is happening to the children in the hospitals, thereby giving the children opportunities for processing their experiences through play and creative activities.

Parental Choice

As a general rule, Swedish ECEC is neighbourhood-based, i.e. child care settings are located close to the homes of the families, thus increasing the opportunities for children to play with peers, and for parents to get together, during other parts of the week than when pre-school-activities are being offered (compare, for example, child care programs located in places where parents work, as in China, or sometimes in the US).

During the 70s and 80s, the shortage of places in public child care could make it difficult for parents to refuse an allocated place. With the expansion of public child care, and the demands placed on local authorities to meet the needs of all families, this situation has gradually changed over the past ten years, and the opportunities for parents to choose among several ECEC-alternatives have increased.

Parental choices might include pre-schools vs family day care homes. It might also involve a choice among different ECEC-profiles, such as “music” or “art and creativity”, or pedagogical alternatives, based for example on the principles of Montessori, Waldorf or Reggio Emilia .

Inside the programs, parental perspectives and preferences should be respected, as highlighted in the 1998 National Curriculum, which states that the work-team in the pre-schools should take due account of the viewpoints of the parents, when planning and carrying out activities, and make sure that parents are involved in assessing these activities.

Along the same lines, private, non-profit or for-profit organisations entitled to public support and offering cultural, educational, or religious alternatives to public child care, have become more common during the 90s. In 1998, 13 percent of all children enrolled in pre-school were enrolled in privately organised pre-schools, usually in a parent co-operative centre. As noted earlier, privately organised ECEC-settings have to meet the standards of public child care. Parental fees are not allowed to deviate too much from the municipal norms, and the programs have to follow the values and goals as stated in the national curriculum for pre-schools.

Families with Limited Access to Public Child Care

There are certain groups of families who would like to have a place in public child care, but still find themselves and their child excluded from pre-schools, family day care homes or leisure-time centres.

One group of families which have problems obtaining a place for their children in an ECEC-setting is the group of unemployed parents. The

number of children with unemployed parents increased rapidly during the 90s. In 1997, for example, 59 000 children aged between 1-6 years had an unemployed mother and 40 000 an unemployed father. In 1991 the corresponding figures were 19 000 and 17 000 respectively. Children with an immigrant background are over-represented amongst the children of the unemployed.

A recent study indicates that in 40 percent of the municipalities, children lose their place in child care if a parent loses his or her job. Another 40 percent of the municipalities offer child care a limited number of hours to children with unemployed parents. Some municipalities (35 of 289) offer separate, short-time child care to unemployed parents, often to assist parents in their job-seeking attempts. In a different study, 76 percent of all unemployed parents indicated a strong interest in keeping the place in child care for their child, regardless of whether they found a job or not.

When families have a second child, one of the parents, usually the mother, makes use of the paid parental leave insurance to stay home and take care of the infant during the first year. In most municipalities, children in public child care automatically lose their place when a parent takes parental leave. Some of these parents (44 percent) would prefer a situation where the older child was allowed to stay in the pre-school or family day care home also during this parental leave period. Friends and play-mates might be few and far-between in the neighbourhood during the daytime.

For some parents, the costs of public child care might be the balance that tips the scale financially. The percentage of costs for public child care accounted for by parental fees has increased over the past ten years from 10 to 16 percent. Variations between different regions have been substantial. The issue of whether some families are prevented from using public child care because of high parental fees was highlighted in a survey conducted in 1996, which revealed major differences in parental fees between low-cost and high-cost municipalities.

For some families, access to public child care might be limited by the organisational structure of the alternatives offered, particularly in relation to opening hours of pre-schools and family day care homes. In today's service-oriented society, many parents work odd hours (i.e. evenings, nights, weekends or irregular shifts). Public child care, however, is for the most part available only for families where parents work "regular office-hours", i.e. weekdays 8 am-5 pm. Some municipalities, however, offer public child care during odd hours, usually in family day care homes but also in centres open at nights.

Multicultural ECEC

In the Swedish pre-school there are today children from many different cultures. The goal of the pre-school for children who have their roots in a culture other than Swedish, is to provide the foundations for active bilingualism and a dual cultural identity. Culture and mother tongue training support should be an integral part of pedagogical activities. The national curriculum for pre-schools states that the pre-school should assist in ensuring that children with a mother tongue other than Swedish receive the opportunity to develop both their Swedish language and their mother tongue. Mother tongue training is regarded as important not only for the child's language but also for its social and emotional development.

During the 80s mother tongue training was supported in the pre-school with state grants. This resulted in over half the children with a mother tongue other than Swedish receiving mother tongue support. After the state grant was removed, support for this fell dramatically. As a result of the curriculum, however, the goal for mother tongue support has been strengthened and this support can be expected to increase in the future.

Studies have shown that children in immigrant families are underrepresented in public child care. This difference is mostly explained by the lower rates of employment among parents in immigrant families. If parents are working outside the home, children, whose parents are born in another country have a place in public child care at least as often as other children. To support children who do not have access to a regular pre-school, some municipalities in areas with many immigrants have arranged special half-day language-training programs for immigrant children, programs often located in open pre-schools or pre-school buildings.

The National Commission on the Living Conditions of children in urban environments (*Storstadskommittén*) concludes that a large percentage of young children in certain urban areas are excluded from public child care because their parents are unemployed. Many of these are refugee children. The Government has decided to make available, over a three-year period, special funds for municipalities to be able to offer pre-school activities to all children aged 3 and upwards in "neighbourhoods in need of special support".

V. POLICY APPROACHES

Regulations

Chapter 2 a, paragraphs 1-12 in the School Act contains the basic provisions on how ECEC and school-age child care activities are to be organised. Legislation for the pre-school class can be found in Chapter 2b. (See appendix).

The legislation defines what is meant by pre-school activity and school-age child care and what the tasks of the various activities are. The Act stipulates that the municipalities are obliged to provide pre-school and leisure-time centre activity of high quality without unreasonable delay. This obligation concerns all children from the age of one until the age of twelve, whose parents are working or studying or who need child care support, as well as for all children in need of special support. Child care should be supplied as close to the child's home or school as possible. The wishes of the parent or guardian should be taken into account.

A special article deals with certain quality indicators. In the ECEC-settings there should be staff with the requisite education or experience capable of satisfying the child's need for high quality care and education. The size and composition of the groups of children should be appropriate. The premises should be suitable for their purpose. Activities should be based on the individual needs of each child. Children who need special support for their development should receive care related to their needs.

This legislation entered into force 1995 and involves a tightening and clarification of municipal obligations, compared to earlier legislation. One of the reasons for this was that the grants provided for municipalities at that time changed from being earmarked performance related grants to general grants for all activity for which the municipalities were responsible. Another reason was that the expansion had reached a level of needs coverage where it was thought possible to impose more precise obligations in the ECEC area. The article on quality was prompted as a result of the financial cutbacks in the municipalities and the effects this might have on quality, if the municipalities were required to introduce a child care guarantee.

Essentially the legislation sets out the obligations municipalities should fulfil. Goals are used to state what is expected of the municipalities, rather than regulate in detail how the law should be applied. This means that municipal

decisions concerning pre-school activities and school child care based on child care legislation may be appealed to a court by an inhabitant of the municipality. The court can determine whether the municipality's decision contravenes the legislation, and if this is the case revoke the municipality's decision. The court cannot; however, require the municipality to change its decision. In principle, there is little scope for taking sanctions with respect to the municipality.

The legislation for the pre-school class, which since 1998 has been a part of the school, defines hours of instruction, ages of children and conditions governing fees. The pre-school class is voluntary for the child, but in principle all six year olds have taken part in the pre-school since the middle of the 70s. The pre-school class is intended for all six year-olds prior to the start of their schooling. The activity should provide at least 525 hours and be free of charge.

Since 1998, there has also been a National Curriculum for pre-schools (Lpfö98). The National Curriculum for compulsory school has been adjusted to cover the pre-school class and leisure-time centres (Lpo94). These curricula specify the goals and guidelines for activities, and they both have the same status, structure and perspective on the learning and development of children and youth. For the first time in the history of the pre-school, a national curriculum steers activities and work in pre-schools and leisure-time centres. It is the responsibility of the local organisers and the directors of ECEC-settings to arrange activities in such a way as to fulfil the stipulations, requirements and goals of the School Act and the National Curriculum for pre-schools. Supervisory responsibilities on a national level rest with the National Agency for Education. This agency is currently also developing guidelines for those ECEC-activities which are not covered by the curricula, i.e. family day care homes, open pre-schools, and open leisure-activities.

The supervisory functions and responsibilities of the National Agency for Education are currently undergoing major revisions in an attempt to develop a coherent strategy for supervision and evaluation of all areas of responsibilities. This includes the newly incorporated pre-school activities and school-age child care, an area with different legislation, organisation and history, and also other responsibilities and goals than those forms of schools which already have been placed under the jurisdiction of the Agency. The child care sector includes issues linked to education and care, as well as issues more closely linked to family support and social issues.

Staffing

Types of Personnel

The personnel in Swedish ECEC and school-age child care settings are well-educated. Very few of the personnel lack education for working with children. There are four different types of personnel - pre-school teachers, child minders, family child minders, and leisure-time pedagogues employed by the municipalities to take care of children in pre-schools, family day care homes, leisure-time centres and open pre-schools. Pre-school teachers and leisure-time pedagogues might also work in teams with teachers in the compulsory primary-school system. The educational background and training of these four groups of staff members vary, as do the settings they work in and their professional responsibilities.

The pre-school teacher (*försollärare*) completes a three-year university-level educational program, which combines practical fieldwork in pre-schools with theoretical courses focusing mainly on early child development, family sociology, teaching methods, arts and crafts. Courses in research methods and the development of evaluation skills are also part of this program.

In Sweden, higher-level education at colleges and universities are free of charge to the students and part of the publicly financed sector, just like the compulsory school system. In addition, all students are entitled to low-interest government loans to cover costs of living during the study period. 75 percent of these loans will have to be paid back to the state before the age of 50, the remaining 25 percent are seen as general support to the students. Following graduation, it is normal that a pre-school teacher has accumulated a total of SEK 150 000 in student loans.

After graduation, pre-school teachers are employed to work in pre-schools, open pre-schools or pre-school classes (*försköleklass*). They often find themselves working in teams with child minders (*barnskötare*) the other major staff category in ECEC-settings.

Child minders get their education in the Swedish secondary school, which until recently had a child and youth program as one of its two-year tracks. In addition to offering compulsory courses in mathematics, language and social sciences, this program combined theory and practice, to provide the students with the basic skills in child minding and developmental psychology. This secondary school program has recently been prolonged to three years of schooling, and broadened to include a wider range of options in the area of

Children and Leisure-time activities. After graduation child minders often set out to work in the pre-schools, or in their own homes as family day care mothers. Today there might be difficulties for a child minder to get a job on a regular basis in the ECEC-settings, as many municipalities try to raise quality by increasing the number of pre-school teachers.

Public child care in Sweden is also provided by licensed municipal family child minders (*dagbarnvårdare*) in their own homes. There is no centrally developed educational training program for family child minders, although according to the recommendations of the National Board of Health and Welfare, family child minders should all, in the long run, have a training equivalent to that of a childminders. Many municipalities offer 50-100 hours of mandatory course work as introduction to the family day care occupation, and provide guidance and support through specifically employed supervisors. The family day care home is always inspected and approved by the local authority prior to the recruitment of the family child minder. As a complement to the new National Curriculum for pre-schools, the National Agency for Education is currently producing comparable guidelines for the activities in family day care homes.

School aged children might be offered a place in a leisure-time centre, often located in the school building, where they will spend the afternoon with a group of other school-aged children, cared for and educated by university-trained leisure-time pedagogues (*fritidspedagog*). The education and training of these child care workers are rather similar to that of the pre-school teachers - often the two groups of students take courses together at universities and university colleges.

Personnel Statistics

In 1998, about 96 000 persons were hired to work with children in Swedish pre-schools and leisure-time centres. Converted to full-time employees per year, the number was

84 000. About 5 percent of the personnel were men. The educational level of the personnel continues to improve. In 1998, about 60 percent had completed a university-level education to become a pre-school teacher or a leisure-time pedagogue, 35 percent were certified child minders. Only 2 percent had no training to work with children.

In addition, there were 14 500 family child minders, working in their own homes with 82 000 children, aged 1-12. The educational level of this personnel category has also continued to improve: in 1998, 72 percent of all

family child minders were trained to work with children, either with a family child minders certificate or with a special FCM-course provided by the municipality. In 1990 the corresponding figure was only 41 percent. Table 4 shows the distribution of the major personnel categories in different Swedish child care-settings.

In addition to the above, each ECEC-setting has a director, who is formally responsible for the activities in the setting, as well as the administrative leader. The title of this function varies among municipalities, depending on how close a connection exists between pre-schools and primary schools. In some municipalities primary school principals might function as administrative pre-school directors, in other instances the position might be occupied by an experienced pre-school teacher, who has had some additional administrative in-service training. National statistics from 1998 report a total of 7 700 directors, of whom 14 percent are men.

ECEC directors in a given district normally get together on a regular basis, to share experiences, compare budgets and planned activities, and discuss problems of common interest. One such topic of discussion might be the difficulty in attracting men to work in the child care sector. As noted above, in 1998 only 5 percent of the staff members in Swedish ECEC-settings were men, this does not include a small number of young men who, as conscientious objectors, were doing compulsory public service in day care centres, as an alternative to military training. It is a widely held belief among administrators and child care workers that more men in child care would contribute both to making the pre-schools a better working-environment for adults, and most importantly, give the children a much needed opportunity to spend time in daily activities with adults of both sexes. One reason for the difficulties in attracting men to work with young children in pre-schools and leisure-time centres might be the relatively low salaries offered. Another reason is of course, the perception that working with small children is "breaching" the traditional male role. For this reason the proportion of male personnel in leisure-centres is significantly higher than in pre-school.

Program Content and Implementation

The National Curriculum for Pre-school

In August of 1998, the first National Curriculum for pre-school (Lpfö 98) came into effect, making the pre-school a first step in the Swedish educational system. Overall, the educational system now comprise three

curricula, one for the pre-school, a second for the compulsory school (grades 1-9) also covering the pre-school class for 6-year olds, and a third for the upper secondary school (grades 10-12). The three curricula are linked by a shared view on knowledge, development and learning, and cover the first 20 years of the life-long learning-philosophy of the Swedish society.

The National Curriculum for pre-school is based on a division of responsibilities, where the State determines the overall goals and guidelines for ECEC, and where the 289 municipalities are responsible for implementation of these goals. The curriculum does not specify the means by which specific goals are to be achieved; this is something left for the local organisers and the personnel working in the ECEC-settings to decide upon, and to translate into daily activities in the pre-schools, ideally in co-operation with the parents.

Goals and guidelines for the pre-schools are provided in the following areas: (a) norms and values, (b) development and learning, (c) influence of the child, (d) pre-school and home, and (e) co-operation between pre-schools and the pre-school class, the school and the leisure-time centre. The goals and guidelines of the curriculum are addressed not only to those working in the pre-school, but also to the work team i.e. personnel with pedagogical responsibilities for the children. The goals in the pre-school curriculum are defined as goals to be aimed at rather than explicitly achieved in terms of the individual development and learning of the child. Individual child outcomes will not be formally assessed in terms of grades and evaluations, since children might attend pre-school at different ages over varying periods of time. The curriculum transfers over entirely to the professionals the responsibility for choosing and developing methods to achieve the goals.

The new curriculum replaces the 1987 “Educational Program for Pre-schools”, which was issued by the National Board of Health and Welfare, the supervisory authority for pre-school activities until 1998, when the National Agency for Education took over that responsibility. This was also when legislation related to pre-school activities was incorporated into the School Act.

An important component of the curriculum for the pre-school which it shares with the other curricula is the introductory section on foundation values. Greater emphasis is put in the curriculum on the pre-school and school working on the basis of shared foundation values based on democratic principles, such as responsibility, equality, and solidarity which are to permeate all work and apply to all staff. This is also now an issue for the pre-school and school and high up on the political agenda in Sweden.

The pre-school's curriculum builds on a view of the child as competent and with great inner resources, capable of formulating its own theories about the world, discovering and exploring its immediate surroundings and developing confidence in its own abilities. Children creating their own knowledge presupposes a dialogue and a reflective attitude on the part of adults to the child's learning processes. The pedagogical work involves encouraging children to question, form hypotheses and theories and use their imagination and to observe how they search for answers and give meaning to their daily reality. It also deals with guiding, creating situations and using opportunities that can challenge the child's thinking and theories. The curriculum also builds on the view that children have their own rights and respect for the child as a person and member of society.

The view of knowledge, learning and the holistic view on which the curriculum is based runs through the whole of the educational system from pre-school and upwards. This view of learning is based on the fact that knowledge takes different forms, such as facts, understanding, skills and familiarity and that there is also a dynamic in and between these forms. Implicit in this view is that the industrious child is curious and builds understanding through its own actions, in a dialog with its surroundings and through receiving support in testing its own theories. This holistic view means making use of the full range of the child's abilities, not just intellectual, but also physical, practical- creative and social skills.

The basic principle of the pre-school pedagogical tradition which has been developed over the years can be summarised in five main points.

- Continuous learning and development - child's development and learning takes place continuously and in close co-operation with the surroundings. Children learn the whole time and with all their senses. This means that specific times or situations cannot be set aside for when learning should occur. It also, means that children absorb the whole of a thought or behavioural pattern representing a specific situation.
- Play and theme oriented ways of working - play is of fundamental importance for children and constitutes the basis for pre-school activity. Thinking, imagination, creativity, language, and co-operation are developed. By theme-oriented working, the children's opportunities to understand inter-relationships contexts and test their own theories about their surroundings are strengthened
- Linking to the child's own experiences and knowledge - when children are going to learn something new, they must be able to relate it to what they already know, have experienced and are interested in.

- The pedagogical importance of care - care is of pivotal importance for the child to feel well, and is thus a precondition for development and learning. Care, especially for younger children, also has a pedagogical element, since it provides the experiences and knowledge through which children get to know themselves and the surrounding world.
- Development in groups - children need to experience joy with each other to learn and develop. The child's need for other children cannot be replaced by adults or toys. The child group is an asset in itself. When each child is recognised and validated by adults as the person it is, it can then also be a well-functioning member of the group.

The pre-school's curriculum specifies the requirements the state imposes on activities and as a result what demands children and parents can also impose on the pre-school. The curriculum makes the pre-school more accessible to evaluation and quality assessment through nationally determined goals and guidelines. The curriculum plays an important role in developing quality in the pedagogical work of the pre-school.

Working with Themes

When previously scheduled, structured activities take place in Swedish ECEC-settings, they are usually part of a particular "theme". Theme-oriented activities imply that certain problems or concepts are focused on for longer periods of time, and are analysed and acted upon from several perspectives. Examples of more regular themes might be the local community, the traditional holidays, or the seasons of the year. Other themes might grow out of the children's own questions about gender differences, environmental pollution, or endangered species. The activities linked to any given theme might be quite different depending on the group of children and their questions and interests. Below is a description of the development of the theme "water", from the 1987 Educational Program for Pre-schools:

"The theme "water" might be treated from the perspective of nature, culture or society. The work in one group might, for example, be concentrated on exploring drain pipes and street wells, sewers or hydro-electric water plants, water-wheels and boats. The same theme might in a different group generate discussions and experiments with cultivation and the cycle of water. Another time the theme 'water' might concentrate around the issue of how access to, or scarcity of fresh water might affect the living conditions of people in various parts of the world. For the children, this might mean experimenting with carrying, connecting, or pumping water in various ways. The work on this theme might imply studying a drop of water through a microscope, maybe measuring the amount of rain-water

in the backyard or conducting experiments around freezing and boiling. To find out what floats and what sinks and learn about surface tension are other possible developments of a theme about water. If children show interest, and the theme is worked on in a way which give the children new insights and knowledge, the same theme might be brought up several times during the children's pre-school years".

Working in Teams

Work-teams were recommended as a way of organising the work in ECEC-settings already by the 1968 National Commission on Child Care, hence have a long tradition. The curriculum for pre-schools addresses its guidelines to the work-team, i.e. the group of personnel who are responsible for the care and education of a certain group of children in the pre-school. Theoretical and practical competence, and differing personalities among members in a work-team complement and enrich pedagogical activities and relationships. The pedagogue in the pre-school is often described as the reflecting practitioner.

To meet the goals and guidelines of the curriculum in a professional way, the particular competencies of pre-school teachers are required, which makes this personnel category the basis of the work-teams, where child minders also play an important role. Additional competencies, provided by other professionals might enrich the activities in the pre-schools, i.e. in art, drama or music. Access to personnel trained as special support pedagogues might also be needed in ECEC-settings for children at risk. The needs of the individual children are to determine the composition of the work-teams.

Work-teams might also be described as a goal, rather than a working-method as described above. In its earlier phases, the work-team manifests the idea which is to contribute to carrying out the ambitions of co-operation and solidarity in support of the democratic development of society. Using the work-team as an example of co-operation, children would be socialised into helping each other and play together regardless of age, gender or cultural background. A distant goal was co-operation for the common good.

The work-team as a "pedagogical method", seems over the years to have been given higher priority by the various personnel categories, than the work-team as a "goal".

Integration and Co-operation - pre-school, school, leisure-time centre

In recent years, schools and child care services have been integrated in many municipalities. Intentions and objectives specified on a national level, have been carried out on a local level without detailed national guidelines or financial assistance, supported by decentralised decision-making and the various measures taken since 1991, to make municipalities the responsible employer for all personnel working in schools and child care and to take on full responsibility for organising and running schools and child care services.

Municipal decisions to integrate schools and child care have had educational as well as financial aims. Better use of buildings and better use of personnel belong to the latter category, whereas the active co-operation among the different categories of personnel working in the pre-school class, the school and the leisure-time centre is seen as a way of improving the quality of activities in schools as well as pre-school classes or leisure-time centres. Conditions for creating closer links between pre-school and school have been made possible by changes in legislation. Six year-olds have moved from the school and into the school's pre-school classes. Pre-school teachers and leisure-time pedagogues are now legally entitled to teach in primary schools, as a way of facilitating and encouraging team-work where different professional competencies can work together and thus increase the dynamism of pedagogical work. The work team and mixed age groups, which have long been a part of the pre-school and the culture of leisure-time centres are now starting to become more common in the school as well.

Recent studies indicate that many municipalities are working on integration and co-operation, and that the quality of activities has been improved by these organisational changes. Co-operation between different personnel categories usually takes place during school hours, i.e. when pre-school teachers or leisure-time teachers participate in the primary school classroom. Primary school teachers rarely stay in the school building to participate in leisure-time activities.

Working in teams made up of different personnel categories has been positively valued by the personnel, and perceived as continuing "in-service training" through daily activities in co-operation with team-members with different training and skills. It is important, however, that the idea of co-operation is established firmly among the personnel, creating a motivation to change and improve existing practices in education and care.

Family Engagement and Support

Co-operation between homes and ECEC-settings has a long tradition in Sweden. The Swedish ECEC is a complement to the home and builds on close and good working relationships between parents and personnel. The basis of the co-operation is formed when the child starts in child care and develops through daily contact. It is the responsibility of the personnel that parental co-operation comes into existence and is developed.

The national curriculum for the pre-school is very specific in stating that the work in pre-school settings should take place in close and confidential co-operation with the home, and that parents should have the opportunity, within the framework of the national goals, to be involved and influence activities in pre-school settings. It is also said that the activities in child care settings are to take the living conditions of the children outside these settings into consideration so it is therefore important that the planning for these activities takes place in co-operation between personnel and parents.

All personnel in child care are bound by legal regulations on confidentiality, which means they are not permitted to communicate what a parent has said in confidence without their consent if this would have a negative impact on the parent. However, in a situation involving child abuse the obligation to notify takes precedence.

Parental involvement might take different forms, and operate on different levels. Some parents are satisfied knowing that their children are happy to spend time in pre-schools or family day care homes, and are well taken care of by the personnel. Receiving regular information about their child might be enough to fulfil the needs of these parents. Other parents want to influence planning, discuss decisions or even participate in daily activities in the ECEC-settings. Parental participation might, in this case, range from cleaning, cooking or repairing toys, to taking part in field trips or the daily work with the children in the ECEC-settings.

Parents have also been encouraged to be more involved in budget discussions and to state their preferences on issues ranging from opening hours and financial spending to food served for lunch or program focus on environmental protection or computers. Active parental involvement in ECEC-settings, and expectations on active parental participation, should be seen in the light of the fact that parents are expected to be away working or studying while their children are spending their days in child care settings. The programs will have to be designed in such a way as to function well without parental participation in day-to-day activities.

Different Forms of Parental Involvement

When a child starts in child care, a specially designed adjustment-period, usually two weeks in length, is scheduled. During this period parents spend time with their child in the ECEC-setting. This adjustment period sets the stage for future co-operation, and is considered very important. A child, who is about to start in child care, is often assigned a special staff member from the working-team. For example, in a group of 18 children and three members of staff, each adult has a special responsibility for six of the children, and in building a workable relationship with the parents. Many pre-school teachers state that this adjustment period is just as important for the parent and the personnel, as it is for the child.

When parents leave or pick up their children in the ECEC-settings, there should be an opportunity for informal chat around the daily activities in the setting. Morning or afternoon informal chat in the hall, while dressing or undressing a child, is often an important way of sharing information about what the day was like, in the pre-school or parents' work-places. In two-parent families, mothers and fathers often take turns leaving or picking up their child, which gives the personnel a chance to get to know both parents.

Individual conferences are scheduled on a regular basis, usually twice a year. During these meetings, usually 15-30 minutes long, parents and staff members have a chance to discuss in more detail matters inside or outside the pre-school affecting the child, and also to talk about the development and learning of the individual child.

Group meetings with parents and staff-members are also scheduled a couple of evenings a year, to provide opportunities for information sharing and discussion. Some parents attend with enthusiasm and engage in lively discussions at these meetings, other parents feel left out and shy, and find it difficult to participate. Picnics, field-trips or "work-days", where parents and children together paint a room or replant the garden, might be more appreciated by some parents as ways of getting together.

The personnel in today's Swedish pre-schools are well educated. Parents are also well informed about their role as parents. They have had a certain amount of parental education when visiting Mother Clinics (MVC) or Well-baby Clinics (BVC) during pregnancy and after delivery, and they have often read on their own about child development and parenting. The foundation for successful parent-staff co-operation is present. Nevertheless, parental involvement might be easier in theory than in practice. Clearly expressed as a goal in the National Curriculum, it works well in many pre-

schools. It is also important to stress the fact that frequency or time for co-operation activities might not be the most important aspects of parental involvement. Quality of personnel-parent relationships, and the trust built into these relations are known to be key issues in this area.

But parental involvement is also related to the resource levels of the parents. Long hours at work, and the additional responsibility for the home and the family may be more than enough physical or psychological burden for a day, leaving little energy to invest in discussions at the pre-schools or family day care homes, especially if parents are confident that the personnel in the ECEC-settings are doing a good job of caring for and educating their child.

In parent co-operative centres, parental participation often is a prerequisite for enrolment. Parents are employers and have direct influence over activities. In 1997, 21 000 children were enrolled in more than 1 000 privately organised parent co-operatives. Parents often spend one or two weeks per year in the centres, actively involved in the daily activities. Many parent co-operatives require that mothers and fathers take turns doing their share of the work in the centres.

Links to Other Family Policies

We have discussed earlier the paid parental leave program, allowing parents to stay home to take care of their child for twelve months after the child is born. Parents with young children also have the right to work shorter hours should they choose to do so. Also related to parental involvement in pre-schools is a system of flexible working hours ("flex-time") offered at several work-places, which might give parents a chance to stay and talk for an extra 15 minutes in the morning, or show up 15 minutes earlier than usual in the afternoon to meet children and personnel in the pre-school, thus relieving much time-pressure for those parents able to utilise this system. Such opportunities for flexible parental participation might be an important tool for improving the relationships between homes and ECEC-settings.

Funding and Financing

Gross Costs

The total gross costs for the Swedish child care-system amounted in 1998 to SEK

40 000 millions (ECU 4 400 millions). These costs include ECEC-settings for pre-school age children (1-5) as well as school-age child care in leisure-time centres, family day care homes and open activities. Costs have stayed the same during the period 1991 - 1998, despite the fact that the number of children in pre-schools, leisure-time centres and family day care homes have increased by 185 000 during the same period.

If productivity is measured in changes in costs per hour, studies show that these costs have been reduced by about 20 percent in day care centres (now labelled pre-schools) and leisure-time centres, but have remained the same, or increased slightly in family day care homes during the period. The increase in productivity has been brought about mainly through an increase in number of children in the groups, and a reduced adult/child ratio.

The average annual gross cost per child for a place in a Swedish child care-setting amounted in 1998 to about SEK 56 000 (ECU 6 200), but costs vary among different types of settings. (Table 9)

In the 70s and 80s, the running costs for a place in a Swedish ECEC-setting were divided between the national Government, the municipalities, and the parents in such a way that the state and the municipalities each covered about 45 percent of the costs and the parents the remaining 10 percent as direct child care fees. Parents usually paid on a sliding scale based on income, and the grants from the national Government to the municipalities were earmarked to be used specifically to cover child care costs.

This funding system changed during the 90s, when support for decentralisation of decision-making and responsibilities has been high on the political agenda. Specifically defined state grants have been replaced by general government block grants. To cover the costs of child care, municipalities might combine the use of income tax revenues and parental fees in various ways. In 1998, 17 percent of the costs were financed through parental fees, compared with about 10 percent, seven years earlier. Parental income continues to affect these fees, and most municipalities have started to use a payment-system linked to the number of hours per week a child is present in the ECEC-setting, in an attempt to try to affect family demand for child care.

Costs of child care are higher in the largest cities, partly to be explained by more expensive buildings, a larger percentage of children in need of special support, and the need for children to spend more hours in ECEC-settings because of longer travel distances for parents to get to their work-places. Differences among municipalities might also be linked to differences in

adult/child ratios, group sizes and age distribution among children. Varying degrees of integration between schools, pre-schools and school-age child care might also be important in making more efficient use of available resources.

The distribution of costs across areas of education and social services among Swedish municipalities has received considerable attention during the past ten years, as financial cut-backs and savings have been high on the political agenda. Ways of measuring, analysing and comparing municipal costs and priorities have been refined and available information made more detailed. There is also a need to broaden these analyses to include not only gross costs of i.e. ECEC-activities, but also to further investigate the municipal and societal net effects of publicly financed programs. Such studies were conducted in the beginning of the 80s, indicating positive relationships among variables such as child care spending, employment rates, tax revenues, and GNP.

Parental fees

Parental fees are of great importance for the finances of families with children as well as for working patterns, and they can also affect pedagogical activities in pre-school or the leisure-time centre. Both the level of fees and how they are determined are of importance.

During the 90s increasing numbers of municipalities have changed their child care fees. The fees have been raised and new ways of determining them have been introduced. A strong trend has been the increasing linkage between fees and the hours a child attends. Differences between municipalities have also become greater.

Recent studies (1996) show that the use of parental fees to finance ECEC-costs varies substantially among the 289 municipalities in Sweden. As an example, an average income family with two children in public child care for 33 hours per week, paid a monthly fee of SEK 1 300 in a low-cost municipality, compared to SEK 3 400 in a high-cost municipality, a difference of more than SEK 25 000 per year (2 800 ECU). Government authorities have repeatedly stressed that high quality pre-school activities should be available on an equal basis to families with young children, regardless of the part of the country families live in. With differences in parental fees such as in the example above, there might be a danger that low-income families limit their use of public child care to survive financially. Attendance-related fees might force these families to minimise the number of hours per week their child spends in the pre-school or family day care

home, thereby perhaps limiting the opportunities for their children to participate in developmentally stimulating activities and relationships in the ECEC-settings.

Another trend is the development of income-related fees. This means that the marginal effects can be high when a family's income increases.

Studies focusing on the relationship between parental fees and quality of activities in ECEC-settings highlight possible negative effects if parents, in order to save money, try to minimise the number of hours their child spends in a pre-school or a family day care home, thus disturbing the flow of events or planned activities for the child in the day-to-day interactions with peers and personnel in the ECEC-settings.

V. EVALUATION AND RESEARCH

From Basic Research to Program Development and Evaluation

The fact that an increasing number of young children came to spend time in settings away from their homes and their mothers, as a result of the changing roles of women, caused a lot of concern among many politicians, child psychologists and parents in the 60s and the 70s. Backed by earlier studies of children in orphanages, or other kinds of full-time institutions, psychological theories on the importance of early mother-child attachment, and, for that matter, traditional values that “women should be at home taking care of the family”, opponents of out-of-home care claimed, that it might be harmful for the healthy development of the child to be placed in public day care centres while their mothers were working, a claim which caused intense political discussions, media debates and public involvement .

Longitudinal studies, carried out in Sweden in the 70s and 80s, showed, however, that children in full-time public day care centres, when compared to children raised at home, developed just as normally as, or sometimes even surpassed, their counterparts brought up at home. These research findings, in combination with the rights for parents to stay home from work with pay following the birth of a child, thus reducing possible negative impacts of early mother-child separation, have alleviated a lot of the earlier criticism.

The discussion did, however, also generate an understanding, that some children, who might be particularly sensitive to infections, or who might find life in large centre groups to be an overwhelming experience, socially or emotionally, might be better off in the smaller, more homelike atmosphere of the family day care home.

The general consensus today is, that pre-schools are important for children in order to stimulate development and learning, and offer care and education in activities and relationships with a stable group of adults and peers outside the home. They also represent an important and much needed complement to home care, when parents are working or studying. Family day care homes will also continue to be available for families who, for one reason or another, choose this kind of arrangement, but surveys, carried out among parents of pre-schoolers, show that the pre-school is the child care alternative preferred by most parents. Open pre-schools, available to children not enrolled in pre-schools and their parents, are also important in meeting the needs of these children for pedagogically stimulating activities with groups of other children.

National Child Care Statistics as Sources of Information

One very important source of information for monitoring the development of the Swedish ECEC-system and evaluating the effects of policy decisions, are the official statistics on child care.

In Sweden some authorities, amongst them the National Agency for Education, are by law responsible for collecting and publishing official statistics in their respective areas. Official statistics are an important basis for national socioeconomic planning and research and are also used for international comparisons. The Government and the Swedish Riksdag, state authorities, municipalities and county councils are amongst its users as well as researchers, the media and different interest organisations such as trade unions and political parties. Last but not least, official statistics guarantee that the individual citizen has access to information about society and thus has the opportunity to monitor and influence societal development.

The National Agency for Education is responsible for the official statistics on child care and the school system. The National Agency for Education assumed responsibility for collecting and publishing national statistics on child care from the National Board of Health and Welfare when the provisions governing child care were transferred in 1998 from the Social Services Act to the School Act. Before 1994 these statistics had been compiled by Statistics Sweden from the 1960s, when the major expansion in child care was initiated.

Statistics in the child care sector have made it possible to monitor expansion over the whole period. Combined with data on population and the labour market, these statistics have shown how access and demand have changed in different parts of Sweden, thereby giving the state and municipalities a basis for monitoring and supporting development. Development of quality has also to some extent been monitored. The existence of relevant statistics has been an important instrument for attaining the expansion goals set up - child care of good quality, accessible to all children throughout Sweden.

The statistics have been continuously improved and adjusted to take account of changes in activities. A major part of the information collected today is, however, the same as in the 60s. In the 90s there has been a growing interest in "Key Figures" which makes it possible to easily compare different municipalities, especially as regards costs. There is ongoing development work, both in municipalities and in the National Agency for Education in order to improve the quality of data.

Initially data were collected from each day care centre, but since the 70s the municipalities have been responsible for providing the data. Each autumn a

questionnaire is sent out to all 289 municipalities concerning municipal and privately organised child care. The National Agency for Education publishes the results in reports which are also available electronically on the Agency's web site. Data is available for each municipality.

Today data is collected on the following:

- number of children of different ages who are registered in pre-schools, leisure-time centres and family day care homes
- number of open pre-schools
- number of employees in pre-schools, leisure-time centres , family day care homes and their training
- number of child minders and their training
- number of groups in pre-schools and leisure-time centres, size of groups in pre-schools
- size of groups in family day care homes
- opening hours in pre-schools, leisure-time centres , family day care homes and open pre-schools
- number of children in pre-schools and family day care homes with a mother tongue other than Swedish and numbers receiving support in their mother tongue
- costs of municipalities for pre-school, family day care home, leisure-time centres and open activities.

Parallel with the collection of official statistics, other surveys of a statistical character are carried out more or less frequently. Nation-wide surveys of different aspects of the ECEC-system are part of the regular monitoring system developed by the National Board of Health and Welfare and subsequently continued by the National Agency for Education. For example, during the 80s and 90s, major surveys were carried out on parents with children aged 1-6 years to identify demand for and access to child care in different groups of the population. Other surveys, carried out over the past three years are: "Access to child care for children with unemployed parents", "Productivity and quality in child care 1991-1996", "Analysis of factors influencing parents of small children ", "Mapping of parental fees in pre-schools and leisure-time centres" and "Children in need of special support in child care". These are referred to in other parts of this report. All these studies are carried out to provide information about municipalities in Sweden.

It is evident that such types of systematically collected, nation-wide, detailed types of information are extremely valuable sources of information for policy-makers and planners at local and national levels in Sweden, as well as for researchers and educators working in the ECEC-area.

Shifting Focus

Research and evaluation in the ECEC-area has gradually shifted its focus in the 80s and 90s. Much of this work has been linked to quality improvements and control (see section on Quality). Rather than supporting additional research aimed at comparing effects on child development of child care inside or outside the home, more money is now being spent on developing and evaluating the programs in operation within the Swedish ECEC-settings.

When funds linked to program development were made available to municipalities by the National Board of Health and Welfare, 175-200 applications arrived annually from municipalities eager to try out, in individual centres, new parent-staff communication programs, educational programs, organisation development programs, etc., and to evaluate such programs.

The ongoing work at the national level on reforming the ECEC- and school-systems identified certain areas of particular interest to local program development, areas into which available funds were channelled. "School-age child care and integration with the schools", "age-flexible entry-dates to schools" or "pre-schools for all children" are examples of such high-priority areas. Other important program development areas have been "pedagogical methods for working with the youngest children", "group-oriented work-methods in ECEC-groups with a large number of children", programs linked to "environmental protection and conservation" or "male personnel in ECEC-settings".

Networking among projects working in the same program development area was a new, and successful way of sharing experiences, documentation, and evaluations among the projects. This new idea spread across several program-development themes, such as "Environmental education" or "computers and IT in pre-schools and schools", two areas receiving special attention also in the new national curriculum for pre-schools.

Municipalities working together in networks were granted special financial support from the national level to continue this work. National authorities would also invite municipalities to participate in regular dissemination seminars under different headings, and to document the work carried out in

between these seminars, producing and distributing various forms of written materials for public use. The network “Immigrant children in child care” is an example of such an attempt to improve activities for immigrant children enrolled in ECEC- or school-age child care.

Ongoing Program Development, Evaluation and Research

In its supervisory and monitoring capacity, the National Agency for Education is involved in several ongoing or recently finished projects and programs in the ECEC-area.

A forecast of future recruitment-needs among pre-school and leisure-time pedagogues was recently published. Studies aimed at monitoring the integration of the pre-school class and the school are underway. In depth studies of the development of contents and working methods in the integration area, as well as its consequences for the development of early language, reading and writing competencies are carried out.

In a separate study, the integration-process in work-teams made up of different personnel categories was focused on, with particular emphasis on analyses of professional language-patterns, organisation cultures, or social interaction patterns in planning meetings with mixed groups of personnel.

The work on identifying and establishing quality indicators in ECEC-settings and schools is continuing.

A recently published review of evaluation and research in the ECEC-area, funded by the National Agency for Education, concluded that the needs for evaluation of ECEC-activities will increase in the future, creating a need for evaluation program developments at the local municipal level. With the new national curriculum for pre-schools in operation, evaluations serves among other things to evaluate the extent to which the national goals have been fulfilled in pedagogical practice at the local level. School-age child care, child care in a multi-cultural society, and the potential of information technology have been identified as particularly important areas for evaluation.

Documentation of pedagogical activities as a basis for evaluation and quality improvements, is being studied in a different project. Tied to this project is the production of study-materials to assist in implementing pedagogical documentation as a working-method in ECEC-settings.

The National Agency for Education is also directing some of its resources toward the area of more basic research. University research teams are

currently engaged in producing comprehensive research-reviews of children's learning from early ages and onwards, with special focus on the transition from pre-school to school.

An invitation to outline and specify research areas of particular interest for longitudinal research aimed at gaining knowledge about steering systems, organisational models, and norms, values and content areas within pre-schools, pre-school classes, and early years of primary schooling, was recently issued to departments of education, psychology, sociology, and political sciences at universities and university colleges all over Sweden.

Ways in which children and personnel in ECEC-settings work together to define and construct culture and knowledge are being analysed in research projects based on experiences from extensive development work in Swedish pre-schools co-operating with pre-schools in Reggio Emilia in Italy. From a social constructivist perspective on knowledge and learning, based on the conception of the child as an active, co-constructing agent, and a subject with rights, responsibilities and potentials, studies of communication and co-operation patterns are used to analyse the role of the ECEC-worker as a reflecting practitioner, working in close co-operation with the child in constructing knowledge and culture.

The child as an active learner, searching for knowledge and developing this knowledge through play, social interaction, exploration and creativity, as well as through observations, discussions, and reflections in co-operation with the surrounding social world, also represent the dominant official view of young children in today's society, as formulated in the new curriculum for pre-schools (Lpfö98).

Other long-lasting and influential Swedish research projects on children's thinking and learning systematically highlight the importance of using the child's own experiences and thoughts about the world as goals as well as a means of working with children in ECEC-settings. Pedagogues in these settings need to work on making children communicate and reflect. They also need to make use of the diversity of ideas and thoughts identified by the children as themes and content in daily activities in ECEC-settings. The active, curious and competent child is focused on, knowledge is defined and created in social co-operation.

"The starting point for the pre-school is the experience children have already gained, their interests, motivation and compulsion to acquire knowledge" (Lpfö98) - The link between research and policy is quite clear in the area of Swedish ECEC.

VII. CONCLUDING COMMENTS AND ASSESSMENTS

In July of 1996, responsibilities for pre-school activities and school-age child care were shifted from the Ministry of Health and Social Services to the Ministry of Education and Science. The provisions governing child care were transferred in January 1998 from the Social Services Act to the School Act. In conjunction with this, the National Agency for Education assumed the responsibility for child care from the National Board of Health and Welfare.

Since then several reforms have come into force. The pre-school class has been introduced as a voluntary part of the school system. Pre-school teachers and leisure-time pedagogues have been given opportunities to teach in primary schools. The curriculum for compulsory schools had been adjusted to encompass both the pre-school class and the leisure-time centre.

In August 1998, the first national curriculum for pre-schools was introduced, making the pre-schools the first step in life-long learning in a comprehensive educational system for children, youth, and adults in Sweden.

The educational role of ECEC has been strengthened and been made more visible. Prerequisites for a continuation of the integration between pre-school, school, and leisure-time centres have been created, as the co-ordination of pre-school activities, school-age child care and schools now includes steering documents, legislation and supervision.

In observing this shift in responsibilities and focus, it is important to bear in mind that the Swedish child care system, since the start of its expansion 30 years ago, has had the dual function of supporting children's development and learning and making it possible for parents to combine parenthood with work or studies, thereby also constituting a prerequisite for equality in society. This double function will continue to be present, and pre-school activities will continue to offer care as well as education to children.

Access to pre-school activities and school-age child care has never been higher than today. "Full coverage" in relation to existing legislation has basically been achieved, now that municipalities are able to offer child care without unreasonable delay to the extent that this is required by parents.

This means that 72 percent of all children, 1-5 years old, 94 percent of six-year olds and 58 percent of 7-9 year old school children are now enrolled in

child care. A small percentage of the children in pre-school activities and school-age child care - 12 and 5 percent, have a place in a family day care home.

The educational level and experience of the personnel has increased considerably during the past ten years, and today the percentage of personnel with university-level training - pre-school teachers and leisure-time pedagogues - amounts to a full 60 percent of all child care workers. The remaining group are trained as child minders, only a few are not trained to work with children. The educational level of family child minders has also increased. Today 72 percent are trained child care workers.

The issue of a joint university level education base for pre-school teachers, leisure-time pedagogues and primary school teachers has recently been raised by a Governmental Committee.

When analysing child care access and quality, there are, however, still challenges to be met. The very rapid expansion of the child care system, combined with severe cutbacks in municipal budgets during the 90s, has led to larger groups of children and to lower adult/child ratios in pre-schools, family day care homes and leisure-time centres. Pre-school activities and school-age child care were those municipal activities exposed to the largest savings during the past ten years. Even though the number of children increased by 185 000 between the years 1991 and 1997, total municipal costs for child care remained the same.

Nation-wide evaluations of quality have not been conducted during the past three years, which is why it is unclear to what extent quality of pre-school activities and school-age child care has been affected by these cutbacks and changes. Methods for monitoring changes on a national level of the general quality of pre-school activities and school-age child care need to be developed.

Examining and evaluating activities for those children to whom high quality education and care are most important, will be crucial in the years to come. The youngest children in the pre-schools, the 1-3 year olds, are particularly dependent on a secure, trusting environment with stable adult relationships and daily routines. Many municipalities have a clearly defined ambition to keep group-sizes down for the youngest children. Despite this fact, 62 percent of children younger than 3, spend their days in groups of 16 or more children.

Children with immigrant backgrounds might also be a group of children that are more dependent than other children on high general ECEC-quality,

especially in relation to language development. All children with immigrant backgrounds need access to the Swedish language to be able to open doors to Swedish society. It is also important that these children are provided with opportunities to maintain and develop their mother tongue. Prerequisites for working in multi-cultural ECEC-groups will have to be analysed and given special attention.

As the importance of ECEC for children's development and learning is gradually being recognised, and a large majority of all children are now enrolled in pre-school activities, children who, for one reason or another, are excluded from participation are getting increased attention.

The fact that pre-school activities are now expected to be organised in accordance with the goals and values of the national curriculum, clarifies the task and its importance for children's learning and development. Conditions at school start might be very different if some children have several years of pre-school experience when they enter the pre-school class, whereas other children have not. This is of particular concern if it applies to children from socially disadvantaged environments, who would have been especially supported by participating in the activities in pre-schools.

Municipal rules and regulations when parents are unemployed might be one reason why some children do not attend pre-schools. Another reason might be high parental fees.

The pre-school represent the first step in life-long learning. Care and education in pre-schools are important for children's development and learning. Pre-schools might also be seen as an important preparation for later schooling. A pre-school of high quality should have as its goal to be accessible to all children from early ages.

The Government considers a universal pre-school to be offered to all children, currently to be one of the most important reforms within the educational system. No child should be excluded from pre-school activities because of high fees, regulations excluding children of unemployed parents, or other such reasons.

That is the reason the Government is now proposing the introduction of a universal pre-school for four- and five-year olds. Municipalities would be obliged to offer such a place to all children, but participation would be voluntary. The activities would be free of charge, and include a minimum of three hours per day.

Another area which the Government finds unacceptable is that a child whose parents become unemployed loses its place in a pre-school setting.

This happens in almost half of all municipalities. For this reason a reform is now being prepared which would have the effect that children of parents who are looking for work are entitled to attend pre-school on the same basis as children whose parents are working or studying.

Parental fees linked to pre-school activities have increased during the 90s. The variation among municipalities in levels of parental fees, and the system for determining these fees, are substantial. It is important that parents are not prevented from enrolling their children in pre-school activities by high parental fees. Income related and time related fees might also have a negative impact on parents possibilities to work or increase their working hours since raise of salaries will be largely reduced by increased fees.

This is why the Government is now preparing a proposal for the introduction of a maximum parental child care fee. The intention is that maximum parental child care fees and universal pre-schools will be introduced stepwise, starting in year 2001. Municipalities will be compensated for economic consequences of the various parts of the reforms.

With the implementation of a tripartite reform bringing about:

- a universal pre-school free of charge open for children from the age of four, to at least three hours per day,
- pre-school activities for the children of parents looking for work ,
- a low and flat rate for all pre-school activities and school-age child care,

The Swedish child caresystem will become an integral part of the general welfare system just like the school, parental insurance and health and medical care.

APPENDICES

Tables

Table 1. Female and Male Labour Force Participation by age of youngest child 1998. Percent

	Women	Men
With children 0-6	78	92
With children 7-10	87	93
Total	74	79

Source: Statistics, Sweden

Table 2. Proportion men and women working full-time and part-time with children of different ages, 1998. Percent*

	Full-time	Part-time	Total
With children 0-6			
Women	54	46	100
Men	94	6	100
With children 7-10			
Women	56	44	100
Men	95	5	100
With children 11-16			
Women	67	33	100
Men	94	6	100

Source: Statistics Sweden

* age of youngest child

Table 3. Number of children enrolled in Swedish ECEC-settings and School-age child care in 1968 – 1998

Year	Pre-school	Family day care home	Leisure-time centre	Total	Part-time group*
1970	33 000	32 000	6 500	71 500	86 000
1980	135 000	125 500	43 000	303 500	104 500
1990	267 500	156 000	108 500	532 000	63 000
1995	360 000	123 500	210 000	694 000	67 000
1996	366 000	110 000	239 500	715 500	75 000
1997	363 000	96 000	264 000	723 000	84 500
1998**	338 000	82 000	300 000	720 000

* refers to the total number of children enrolled i.e. also includes children enrolled in other pre-school activities

** in 1998 the terms “day care centre” and “part-time group” were replaced by “pre-school”. Six year-olds, who earlier took part in part-time groups now attend the pre-school class

Table 4. Percentage of children in different age groups, enrolled in full-time ECEC-settings 1990-1998

Year	Pre-school/leisure-time centre		Family day care		Total	
	1-5 years	6 years	1-5 years	6 years	1-5 years	6 years
1990	39	45	17	19	56	64
1995	52	62	14	10	67	72
1996	56	66	14	9	70	74
1997	59	69	13	7	72	76
1998	61	68	12	6	73	74

Table 5. Children enrolled in pre-schools (day care centres) 1994-98. Percent of all children in each age group

Age of child	1994	1996	1998
1	25	34	34
2	45	54	60
3	51	59	64
4	57	63	69
5	59	65	73

Table 6. Children enrolled in leisure-time centres 1994-98. Percent of all children in each age group

Age of children	1994	1996	1998
6	22	36	54
7	51	60	66
8	46	53	60
9	32	39	44
10	9	11	12
11	3	4	5
12	1	2	2

Table 7. Full-time employees per year by education in different Swedish ECEC- and School-Age Child Care Settings in 1998. Percent

	Pre-school	Leisure time centre
Pre-School Teacher/Teacher	54	26
Leisure-time Pedagogue	1	44
Child minder	42	21
Other	1	1
No education for children	2	3
Total	100	100

Table 8. Average salary levels among Swedish ECEC-personnel 1999

	Salary (SEK)
Pre-school Teacher	15 500
Leisure-time Pedagogue	15 500
Child minder	14 000
Family Child minder	13 500
Compulsory School Teacher (Grade 1-9)	18 500
Upper secondary School Teacher (Grade 10-12)	19 500

Table 9. Swedish Child Care - costs in 1998 (Gross costs)

Total costs	42 mdr SEK
per child average	56 200 SEK
Pre-school (day care centre)	25.8 mdr SEK
per child average	71 200 SEK
Family Day Care Home	5.8 mdr SEK
per child average	60 300 SEK
Leisure-time Centre	6.9 mdr SEK
per child average	26 400 SEK

mdr=1,000 million

Excerpt from the School Act

CHAPTER 2 A. PRE-SCHOOL ACTIVITIES AND SCHOOL-AGE CHILD CARE

ARTICLE 1

Each municipality is responsible for providing pre-school activities and school-age child care to children resident in Sweden and permanently residing in a municipality. These activities can also be arranged on a non-municipal basis.

Pre-school activities concern children who do not attend school.

School-age child care concerns children up to the age of 12 attending school. (SFS 1997:1212).

ARTICLE 2

Pre-school activities are run in the form of pre-school, family day care homes and supplementary pre-school activities (open pre-school).

School-age child care is run in the form of leisure-time centres and family day care homes. For children between the ages of 10 and 12, school-age child care can also be provided in the form of open leisure-time centres. School-age child care is required to take care of children during the part of the day when they are not attending school and during holidays. (SFS 1998:352).

ARTICLE 3

The task of pre-school activities is to offer children education and care through pedagogical activities. The task of school-age child care is to supplement the school as well as provide children with meaningful recreation and support in their development.

In order to run pre-school activities and school-age child care, there should be personnel with the requisite education or experience so that the child's need for care and good pedagogical activities can be satisfied.. The groups should have an appropriate size and composition. Premises should be suitable for their purpose.

Pre-school activities and school-age child care should be based on the individual needs of each child. Children who for physical, mental or other reasons are in need of special support in their development, should receive care appropriate to their needs. (SFS 1997:1212).

ARTICLE 4

If a child is being cared for in a hospital or some other institution, those responsible at the institution must ensure that the child has the opportunity to take part in activities equivalent to those provided by the pre-school or leisure-time centres. (SFS 1998:352).

ARTICLE 5

The tasks of the municipality in pre-school activities and school-age child care is performed either by the municipality or by the boards decided on by the municipal council.

The municipality may conclude agreements with another party to carry out the tasks of the municipality in pre-school activities and school-age child care. By means of such agreements, a municipality may supply services on behalf of another municipality. Tasks covering the exercise of authority may not be transferred under this regulation to a company, association, society, foundation or a particular individual. (SFS 1997:1212).

ARTICLE 6

Pre-school activities and school-age child care shall be provided to the extent needed taking account of whether parents are employed or studying as well as the child's own needs.

Pre-school activities shall be provided for children who have reached the age of one. Children who have not yet reached this age shall be provided a place in the pre-school if the child is covered by Article 9. (SFS 1997:1212).

ARTICLE 7

When the child's parent or guardian has notified the need for a place within pre-school activities or school-age child care, the municipality shall provide such a place without unreasonable delay.

The municipality may fulfil its obligations in accordance with Article 6 by offering the child without unreasonable delay an equivalent place in a non-municipal pre-school or a non-municipal leisure-time centre.

The municipality shall take reasonable account of the wishes of the parent or guardian as regards child care when providing a place within pre-school activities or school child care in accordance with the first or second paragraph. (SFS 1998:352).

ARTICLE 8

Places within pre-school activities or school-age child care shall be provided as close to the child's own home or school as is possible with due account

being taken of what is needed to make effective use of premises and other resources. Reasonable account shall also be taken of the desires of the parent or guardian. (SFS 1997:1212).

ARTICLE 9

Children who for physical, mental or other reasons need special support in their development shall be allocated places in the pre-school or leisure-time centre, if the child's need for such support cannot be satisfied in any other way.

The municipality is required to find out which children are in need of such support through outreach activities in accordance with the first paragraph. The municipality shall try to ensure that children use the places allocated and inform parents about their activities and aims.

If a child after a decision by a municipality is staying in a foster home or receiving special care in an institution or living in a different municipality, the municipality which made the decision on where the child stays is responsible for providing means-related support which the child may need in accordance with the first paragraph. The responsibility of the municipality making the placement ceases if the matter is transferred under Article 72 of the Social Services Act (1980:620) (SFS 1998:352).

ARTICLE 10

For places in pre-school, leisure-time centre and family day-care homes arranged by the municipality, reasonable fees may be charged in accordance with the principles decided on by the municipality. Fees may, however, not exceed the costs incurred by the municipality.

For places provided in the pre-school referred to under Article 9, a fee may only be charged for that part of the activity which exceeds 15 hours a week or 525 hours a year. (SFS 1998:352).

ARTICLE 11

In cases concerning the exercise of authority with respect to a particular , the following provisions of the Administrative Procedure Act (1986:223) shall be applied:

Article 14 the first paragraph on a party's right to express himself verbally,

Articles 16 and 17 on a party's right to receive information,

Article 20 on the reasons for a decision, as well as

Article 26 on the correction of errors in documentation and similar.

The provisions in Articles 16 and 17 of the Administrative Procedure Act, however, do not apply to the information concerning another applicant in a case for a place in the pre-school or leisure-time centre. (SFS 1997:1212).

ARTICLE 12

If the tasks of the municipality in pre-school activities and school-age child care are performed by a number of bodies, each such body shall, to the extent requested, provide the others with the information needed to administer the allocation of places. (SFS 1997:1212).

ARTICLE 13

A company, an association, a society, a foundation or an individual person wishing to run a pre-school or a leisure-time centre on a professional basis, shall have a permit for so doing issued by the municipality in which the activity shall be provided. Such a permit is issued until further notice or for a specific period.

A permit is not required for such activities which the municipality through agreements under Article 5, second paragraph has handed over to an individual to perform. (SFS 1998:352).

ARTICLE 14

A permit to provide such activities as referred to in Article 13 may only be granted if the activity fulfils the requirements of good quality and safety.

A permit may be issued subject to conditions concerning quality and safety of the activity.

If either the complete activity or a substantial part of it is changed or moved, a new permit shall be applied for. (SFS 1997:1212).

ARTICLE 15

Activities referred to in Article 13 are subject to the supervision of the municipality in which the activity is being carried out. The municipality is entitled to inspect the activity and receive information and documents it requires to be able to carry out such inspection. (SFS 1997:1212).

ARTICLE 16

If an unsatisfactory state of affairs occurs in such activities referred to under Article 13, the municipality shall require the party responsible for the activity to remedy this.

If the unsatisfactory state of affairs is serious and the municipality's instructions are not followed, the municipality may withdraw the permit. (SFS 1997:1212).

ARTICLE 17

The municipality may provide grants for non-municipal pre-school activities and non-municipal school-age child care, if the activity fulfils the requirements referred to in Article 3 and the fees are not unreasonably high. Such grants should be provided in terms of an amount per child and not deviate unreasonably from the municipality's cost per child in similar activities. (SFS 1997:1212).

ARTICLE 18

The party who is or has been active professionally running a non-municipal pre-school or leisure time centre, may not without authorisation reveal any information that he or she has become aware of concerning the individual's personal circumstances, (SFS 1997:1212).

ARTICLE 19

A decision made by the municipality concerning a permit under Article 13 and an obligation or withdrawal concerning a permit, may be appealed under Article 16 to a general administrative court.

The municipality's decision on an obligation or withdrawal concerning a permit under Article 16 and the court's corresponding decision shall take effect immediately.

Leave to appeal is needed when making an appeal to the Administrative Court of Appeal. (SFS 1997:1212).

ARTICLE 20

A fine may be imposed on the party who operates activities referred to under Article 13 without a permit.

Public prosecution proceedings may only be initiated after the consent of the municipality in which the activity is being operated or by The National Agency for Education. (SFS 1997:1212).

CHAPTER 2B. THE PRE-SCHOOL CLASS

ARTICLE 1

Education in the pre-school class shall stimulate each individual child's development and learning. It shall lay the foundations for future schooling.

Special support shall be given to children needing it. (SFS 1997:1212).

ARTICLE 2

For children who are resident in Sweden, the municipality where the child is permanently residing shall be allocated a place in the pre-school class as of

the autumn term in which the child reaches the age of six and until the child begins compulsory schooling. The pre-school class, shall provide at least 525 hours of education per year.

Children may be accepted into the pre-school class before the autumn term in which the child reaches the age of six.

The municipality may conclude agreements with another party to fulfil the tasks concerning the pre-school class. By means of such agreements, a municipality may supply services on behalf of another municipality. Tasks covering the exercise of authority may not, however, be transferred under this regulation to a company, an association, a society, a foundation or a particular individual. (SFS 1997:1212).

ARTICLE 3

Places within the pre-school class shall be provided as close to the child's own home or school as is possible with due account being taken of what is needed to make effective use of premises and other resources. Reasonable account shall also be taken of the wishes of the parent or guardian.

The municipality shall attempt to ensure that children use the places allocated and inform parents about the activities and aims of these. (SFS 1997:1212).

ARTICLE 4

If a child is being cared for in a hospital or another institution, the organiser must ensure that the child has the opportunity to take part in activities equivalent to those provided by the pre-school class. (SFS 1997:1212).

ARTICLE 5

Education in the pre-school class shall be free of charge. For that part of the activity exceeding 15 hours per week or 525 hours per year, the municipality may, however, charge reasonable fees in accordance with the principles determined by the municipality. Reasonable fees may be charged for children admitted under Article 2, second paragraph. Fees, however, may not exceed the costs incurred by the municipality. (SFS 1997:1212).

ARTICLE 6

A company, an association, a society, a foundation or an individual person wishing to run activities corresponding to the pre-school class are required to have a permit issued by the municipality in which the activity shall be run. Such a permit is issued until further notice or for a specific period.

A permit is not needed for such activities which the municipality through agreements under Article 2, third paragraph has handed over to an individual to carry out. (SFS 1997:1212).

ARTICLE 7

A permit to provide such activities referred to in Article 6 may only be granted if the activity fulfils the requirements for good quality and safety.

A permit may be issued subject to conditions concerning quality and safety of the activity.

If the activity either as a whole or a substantial part thereof is changed or moved, a new permit is required. (SFS 1997:1212).

ARTICLE 8

Activities referred to in Article 6 are subject to the inspection of the municipality where the activity is being run. The municipality is entitled to inspect the activity and obtain information and documents needed to carry out the inspection. (SFS 1997:1212).

ARTICLE 9

If something unsatisfactory occurs in such activities referred to under Article 6, the municipality shall require the party responsible for the activity to remedy this.

If the unsatisfactory state of affairs is serious and the instructions of the municipality are not followed, the municipality may withdraw the permit. (SFS 1997:1212).

ARTICLE 10

The municipality is empowered to provide funds for activities referred to under Article 6, providing the fees are not unreasonably high. Such funds should be provided with an amount per child that does not deviate unreasonably from the cost per child incurred by the municipality in corresponding activities. (SFS 1997:1212).

ARTICLE 11

The party who is or has been active professionally running activities corresponding to the pre-school class, may not without authorisation reveal any information that he or she has become aware of concerning the individual's personal circumstances. (SFS 1997:1212).

ARTICLE 12

A decision made by a municipality concerning a permit under Article 6 and on an obligation or the withdrawal of a permit may under Article 9 be appealed to a general administrative court.

The decision of the municipality on an obligation or the withdrawal of a permit under Article 9 and the decision taken by the court shall have immediate effect.

Leave to appeal is required in order to appeal to the Administrative Court of Appeal. (SFS 1997:1212).

ARTICLE 13

A fine may be imposed on the party who without a permit runs activities referred to under Article 6.

Public prosecution proceedings may only be initiated after consent has been received from the municipality in which the activity has been operated or from The National Agency for Education. (SFS 1997:1212).





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Ministry of Education and
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