

‘We can make a difference’: School leaders’ claims about School-Age Educare in areas with socioeconomic challenges

Marina Wernholm¹, Helena Ackesjö²

Abstract: The aim of this study is to explore how School-Age Educare Centers (SAEC) adapt to the circumstances and needs of pupils living in areas with socioeconomic challenges, and how SAEC can contribute to promote pupils’ continued learning and knowledge development for further education and for life. The Swedish school-age educare offers education and care for children aged 6-12 years old, before and after school. The following research question guides the study: What claims are made about the SAEC contribution to pupils in terms of subjectification and qualification? Data consist of 13 interviews with school leaders working in schools in vulnerable areas, neighborhoods at risk, and particularly exposed zones identified by the Swedish Police. Qualitative content analysis was applied. The study is theoretically grounded in Biesta’s concepts subjectification and qualification, which are used as aspects of education. This study contributes with nuanced descriptions of how the SAEC mission to compensate and complement is claimed to be put into practice. One conclusion is that school-age educare centers can make a difference in children’s life conditions and prerequisites for succeeding in school. Another conclusion is that school-age educare centers emerge as potential arenas for crime prevention.

Article History

Received: 13 October 2024

Accepted: 05 January 2025

Keywords

Compensate; Complement; SAEC; Subjectification; Qualification

Introduction

This study explores how school-age educare (SAEC) in Sweden can make a difference for children living in areas with socioeconomic challenges. The Swedish school-age educare offers education and care for children aged 6-12 years old before and after school. The mission of the SAEC is to complement school and to compensate for children’s living conditions. Data consists of thirteen in-depth interviews with school leaders* and their narratives about school-age educare practice in areas with socioeconomic challenges, highlighting both hindrances and possibilities. A central point of departure for this study is that the location of an SAEC program matters, because where children live and where the school-age educare centers are situated are shown to impact children’s life conditions and prerequisites for succeeding in school (Lindbäck, 2021; Swedish Government Official Reports [SOU], 2020a; Valizadeh, 2023). The school is usually highlighted as a protective factor as it is one of society’s most important crime prevention actors (Lindbäck, 2021; Sandahl, 2021). At the same time, a well-known problem is that students’ home conditions have become increasingly important for how well they succeed in school (Skolverket, 2018). It is shown to be a clear correlation between areas with socioeconomic challenges, a majority of low-income households, and households with a foreign background and mother tongue (Boverket, 2023). It is in these areas that most students leave compulsory school without passing grades (Lindbäck, 2021; Swedish Government Official Reports, 2020b). Additionally, the results from PISA 2022 reveal that the differences between students from different socioeconomic backgrounds have increased (Skolverket, 2023), and the students from areas with socioeconomic challenges scored less on PISA 2022, compared to what they did in 2018. Meanwhile, students from more favorable socio-economic backgrounds performed at the same level. These results imply that the previously identified gap has increased, and it is safe to say that inequity among

¹ Linnaeus University, Faculty of Social Sciences, Department of Pedagogy, Kalmar, Sweden, e-mail: marina.wernholm@lnu.se, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5497-7034>

² Linnaeus University, Faculty of Social Sciences, Department of Pedagogy, Kalmar, Sweden, e-mail: helena.ackesjo@lnu.se, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9523-6379>

* School leaders include principals and assistant principals.

Swedish schools has risen dramatically in the last decade (SOU, 2020a). Prior research shows that schools in disadvantaged neighborhoods in metropolitan areas are affected worst, and in some of these schools, students lack about fifty percent of the grades required to qualify for upper secondary education (Lindbäck, 2021).

This study is focused on how SAEC can make a difference for children's life conditions in areas with socioeconomic challenges. Prior research has shown that children at an early age are already sensitive to condescending attitudes and belittling treatment, which can reduce their self-esteem and performance (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2018). Doubts about one's own abilities can make children already feel like losers in the early school years. Therefore, it is essential to support children at an early age, helping them to position themselves as learning subjects in different ways so that they develop a positive attitude towards education and identify strongly with the school (Ackesjö & Persson, 2021). This is an important mission for the SAEC. School failure can in some instances contribute to reinforcing pupils' experiences of exclusion and not being part of the rest of society (Bunar & Ambrose, 2016). If the children do not get the opportunity to be included in positive environments, such as sports and cultural activities, they may, in worst case, seek inclusion and community in criminal gangs (Wahlgren, 2014).

Many countries offer after-school care, but it is organized and controlled differently, such as by the municipality, by the church or by a community center, and consequently the organization frames the core of the conducted activities (Audain, 2016). However, what is common to all programs is that for a rapidly growing number of children, SAEC has become a socialization environment of great importance throughout Europe, Australia, and the United States (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2006; Plantenga & Remery, 2017). From an international perspective, the Swedish school-age educare is unique, first and foremost because of its close collaboration with the compulsory school and for the fact that the SAEC combines teaching, meaningful leisure time, and recreation. Since 2016, the national curriculum for compulsory school includes a chapter directed especially to the SAEC program (Skolverket, 2022). The primary aim of the educational program is to facilitate complementary learning and teaching activities in relation to the objectives in compulsory school, to compensate for gaps, and to provide meaningful leisure-time for children before and after school hours (Skolverket, 2022).

Since 2011, Sweden has a specialized teacher education program at the university level in SAEC teaching; the qualified teacher in SAEC holds a university degree. In addition, other categories of personnel, such as child carers and recreation leaders, can be hired based on upper secondary credentials. In the case that there are no qualified teachers available, principals can hire unqualified staff a year at a time. In 2021, only 42% of the SAEC personnel were qualified and certified teachers. Today, the Swedish school-age educare is an extended education program which is regulated by the curriculum of the elementary school system (Skolverket, 2022) and adheres to the national Education Act (SFS, 2010). The number of enrolled children is increasing steadily, and eighty-four percent of the six to nine-year-olds attend the SAEC before and after school and on school vacation days (SOU, 2020b). Thus, SAEC is an essential part of the Swedish education system. Therefore, it is problematic that the program is voluntary and only permitted for children (six to twelve years of age) whose parents either study or work and can pay the fee for having their children enrolled in SAEC. This means that some children are excluded from participating in SAEC. In areas with socioeconomic challenges, the mean enrollment rate of 6-9 year-olds is as low as 60 percent and sometimes as low as 30 percent (in comparison with 93 percent enrollment in affluent areas) (Delegationen mot segregation, 2021). The situation in Sweden stands in contrast to the United States where programs have evolved from safe havens, especially in unsafe neighborhoods, into after-school programs with ambitions to promote positive social, cultural, artistic, and character development in youth (Farrell et al., 2019; Halpern, 2000).

The Swedish school-age educare mission, to complement the teaching in school and compensate for children's living conditions, is clearly addressed in school guidelines (Skolverket, 2022; SOU, 2020b), and as mentioned, inequity among Swedish schools has risen dramatically in the last decade (SOU, 2020a). Although this study focuses on pedagogical compensation in the SAEC, the object of the study is placed in

a pluricultural area. Consequently, a few things must be said about the children's prerequisites and the teachers' responsibilities in these areas. One relevant example for this study concerns the role of language(s) in integrating migrant children. Previous research has found that both the children's heritage language(s) and the language(s) of educational institutions are essential for fostering a sense of identity as pluricultural individuals (Little, 2020). Pluricultural individuals possess the knowledge, linguistic, and behavioural skills required to function as social actors within two or more cultures (Galante & dela Cruz, 2024). However, an identified problem is that several studies show that the deficit perspective dominates; in school, children are to be compensated based on their linguistic, cultural, and social background according to the Swedish norm (Åkerblom & Harju, 2021; Bunar & Ambrose, 2016; Lund & Lund, 2016). Recent studies highlight the importance of teachers providing a caring relational climate where migrant children's identities and cultural belongings are valued (Horgan et al., 2022; Lazzari et al., 2020). One fundamental task of the SAEC program is to support students in becoming democratic and empathetic members of society who recognize the inherent values in cultural diversity (Skolverket, 2022). However, SAEC centers also remain key sites for teaching national belonging and identity. Research highlights that both promoting understanding of other cultures and mediating the dominant culture are integral to the curricula and practices in many countries (Mavroudi & Holt, 2015), including Sweden. Previous studies have problematized the tension for teachers, who are both promoters of pluriculturalism and mediators of the dominant culture (Åkerblom & Harju, 2021; Lunneblad, 2017). How the teachers in the SAEC balance the mission to complement and to compensate can illustrate this tension. The Swedish curricula stipulate that "Teaching shall be adapted to the circumstances and needs of each pupil. It shall promote pupils' continued learning and knowledge development based on their background, previous experiences, language or languages, and knowledge" (Skolverket, 2022, p. 6). Therefore, the aim of this study is to explore how SAEC adapts to the circumstances and needs of pupils living in areas with socioeconomic challenges and how SAEC can contribute to promote pupils' continued learning and knowledge development for further education and for life. The following research question guides the study: What claims are made about the SAEC contribution to pupils in terms of subjectification and qualification?

Previous Research

Historically, the Swedish SAEC has been based on a *social pedagogical tradition*, largely centered around a care-focused mission combined with attention to children's fostering and development. This tradition is based on the Nordic EduCare model, which emphasizes humanistic aspects, such as play and rest, well-being, volunteering, and social development (Gustafsson Nyckel, 2020; Johansson, 1984; Pálsdóttir, 2014). However, the mission of the SAEC has changed during the last decades. Since the beginning of the 2010's, more emphasis has been placed on teaching and learning in the SAEC, which is related to the global discourse of knowledge efficiency and the economic aspects of education (Andersson, 2013; Holmberg, 2018). This movement is based on an *educational pedagogical tradition*.

It is safe to say that these changes can be understood in the light of global movements towards a learnification of education (Biesta, 2009; Memišević, 2024). Behind the policy changes and reforms, there are arguments about increasing all pupils' achievement results in school. When the Swedish national results in PISA and other international knowledge assessments fell during the beginning of the 2000's, the focus of educational policy arguments shifted towards a knowledge rationality and knowledge effectiveness at all levels, namely, preschool, SAEC, and school*. The intertwining of early childhood education and care, which was the earlier focus of the SAEC, was transformed into discourses where goal-orientation moved to the foreground instead of social pedagogic values concerning the group of children, its needs and interests (Lager, 2018).

From a political standpoint, there are several reasons to invest in education for young children. These reasons are related to the financial and economic investment paradigm that emphasizes the profitability of strengthening education for young children. It is widely held that young children's experiences of

* The Swedish SAEC is included in the school curricula, and in this way becomes a part of the school system, even if parents, based on the family's needs, can choose whether or not their children participate in this educational program.

participating in early learning environments of high-quality influence their chances in life (Heckman, 2000). Of relevance for this study is previous research showing that children's second language acquisition and their participation in teaching activities are facilitated by the use of multimodal activities and non-verbal communication (Koyuncu et al., 2023, Lötman & Puskás, 2024; Petersen, 2020). Thus, it is suggested that teachers should reflect on how to organize teaching activities from an equity perspective (Lötman & Puskás, 2024). Teaching methods in SAEC often include practical work that offers multimodal learning. The combination of multiple modes contributes to pupils' meaning-making and provides opportunities to learn by imitating what others are doing (Wernholm, 2023).

Research findings suggest that participation in extra-curricular activities, such as the SAEC, is associated with improved academic performance (Guilmette et al., 2019). The SAEC focus on pupils' social relations, their social learning, social skills, companionship, community, and environmental competence is considered to be the core mission of the SAEC (Hippanen Ahlgren, 2021; Johansson, 1984). These soft skills are central for future generations to develop (see e.g. Slot, 2016) and have been identified as key factors for the individual's continued learning (Levin, 2013). The SAEC instruction of soft skills is not considered extra, as something in addition to regular teaching, but as the basis for all development and learning since soft skills are prerequisite to the development of cognitive skills (Håkansson & Sundberg, 2016; Heckman & Kautz, 2013; Levin, 2013). Thus, the SAEC core mission is crucial, as the teaching conducted in the SAEC contributes to the students' learning both in school and in life (Ackesjö et al., 2022; Wernholm et al., 2024). Furthermore, the current focus on learnification can in fact be based in the SAEC historical social pedagogical tradition.

Due to the global and national policy movements, the teachers in SAEC may feel that they are positioned in a field of tension between tradition and new educational policy intentions. In the SAEC, children are to be offered meaningful free time before or after school, including care, rest, and creative activities. At the same time, the SAEC is to be understood as an educational arena with focus on the prescribed skills that children are supposed to develop. SAEC teachers try to navigate between these two different value systems (Ackesjö & Haglund, 2021) as they adapt to the educational policy intentions presented in the revised curriculum, new school law descriptions, and a new teacher education program (Ackesjö et al., 2020; Andersson, 2013; Gustafsson Nyckel, 2020; Haglund, 2015; Holmberg, 2018). While children attend the SAEC, they are to be engaged in activities that support their school achievement and complement the primary school instruction (Ludvigsson & Falkner, 2019). As a result, children's time in the SAEC seems to have become increasingly institutionalized (Andersson, 2013; Saar et al., 2012). The same trends are found in Norway and Denmark (Øksnes et al., 2014) as well as in countries outside the Nordic countries and Europe. The challenge is how the SAEC teachers handle the tensions between teaching and learning in a meaningful and voluntary context based on the children's interests and willingness (Memišević, 2024).

Theoretical Framework

In this study, we use Biesta's (2009) concepts *subjectification* and *qualification* as aspects of education. First, we direct our focus on the school leaders' claims about the subject, which is the child/pupil to be educated. Secondly, we focus on claims related to what the child is supposed to be qualified for by attending the SAEC. These concepts are further explained below.

According to Biesta (2009), education impacts on processes of *subjectification* – discourses of becoming a subject. This implies that there will be claims about the nature of the subject – the child – in the school leaders' narratives. Here, we are concerned with the claims about the nature of the child (the being child) and the desirable child (the becoming child) in the SAEC. Subjectification is about our freedom as human beings, our freedom to act or to refrain from action (Biesta, 2017, 2018, 2022). In other words, the point is how children choose to exist as a subject of their own life, not as the object of what other people want from them (Biesta, 2022). In the process of analyzing the narratives, we raise the question: *what claims are made about the child attending SAEC in areas with socioeconomic challenges?*

The *qualification* discourse of education lies in the meaning of providing children with the

knowledge, skills, and understanding that will allow them to cope with future education and make it possible for them to act in the world (Biesta, 2017, 2018, 2022). Claims about educational qualification relate to something that is not yet present, something that children must be prepared to handle at a later time. Thus, education should focus on encouraging children to become knowledgeable and skillful (Biesta, 2017, 2018, 2022). In the process of analyzing the narratives, we raise the question: *what claims are made about how the SAEC should qualify and prepare children for further education and for life?*

In line with Biesta (2017), we argue that although subjectification and qualification can be distinguished, they cannot easily be separated in practice. Of relevance for this study, with its focus on children residing and attending SAEC in areas with socioeconomic challenges, is Biesta's notion that education should "give students what they *didn't* ask for, first and foremost because *they didn't even know they could ask for it*" (Biesta, 2022, p. 70).

Method

This study is part of the research project *The (un)equal school-age educare center**, with the overarching aim to contribute knowledge about school-age educare compensatory programs in areas with socioeconomic challenges.

Participants and Ethical Considerations

In this qualitative interview study, the participants have been chosen strategically by way of purposive sampling (Bryman, 2012). During the spring of 2023, a questionnaire was sent out to all school leaders working at schools in vulnerable areas, neighborhoods at risk, and particularly exposed zones identified by the Swedish Police (Polismyndigheten, 2021). In total, the questionnaire was sent to school leaders at 159 different schools in 82 different areas/districts in 29 cities. The overall response rate was 63%. In the questionnaire, respondents were asked to indicate whether they wanted to participate in an interview where we could ask follow-up questions. Interviews with 13 school leaders from 13 schools in 10 different cities were conducted, and these interviews form the basis of this article.

The study was implemented in accordance with the ethical guidelines stated by the Swedish Research Council regarding information to the participants about the study, how the interviews would be used, informed consent, anonymity, and the right to withdraw participation from the study without giving a reason (Vetenskapsrådet, 2024).

Data and Data Collection

The semi-structured interviews took place during 2023 and included a set of questions with the possibility of follow-up questions depending on the answer received from the school leaders (Bryman, 2012). The interview guide consisted of four main areas with in-depth questions related to: (1) the area where the school-age educare center is situated; (2) the school-age educare practice; (3) the pupils attending the school-age educare, and (4) the teachers and staff working at the school-age educare center.

All interviews were carried out on a one-on-one basis and recorded via the digital Zoom application. The participants actively gave their informed consent to participate in the study by clicking a dialog box and thereby also accepting to be recorded. The thirteen in-depth interviews lasted between 30-60 min and were transcribed verbatim soon after to avoid losing any data or reducing the complexity of the material.

Analytical Procedures

Qualitative content analysis was applied, inspired by the guidelines from Kuchartz and Rädiker (2023). The first stage of the analysis included reading the transcripts, guided by the questions: What claims are made about the child attending SAEC in areas with socioeconomic challenges? What claims are made about how the SAEC should qualify and prepare children for further education and for life? The identified

* <https://lnu.se/forskning/forskningsprojekt/projekt-det-o-likvardiga-fritidshemmet/>

claims were marked with two different colors (one for each of the questions) to become familiar with the data initially and gain an overview. In parallel, two handwritten documents (one for each of the questions) were created in which keywords and quotes were noted in a systematic way, segmenting the text passages to be coded as suggested by Kuchartz and Rädiker (2023). In line with this method, each of the handwritten documents was transformed into a table in a Word document, to get a better overview and make it possible to search for keywords or quotes. At this stage of the analysis, the keywords and quotes facilitated the identification of a pattern of aspects in the school leaders' claims, and thereafter the formation of categories. Thus, three categories emerged regarding the claims made about the child residing in areas with socioeconomic challenges: the child in need, the child at risk and the child with pluricultural experiences. Another two categories were created concerning the claims made about how the SAEC is to qualify children for further education and life: qualification for further education and qualification for life. In the final stage, there was a selection of excerpts from the empirical data that were representative and descriptive of the identified claims.

Limitations of the Study

This is a small-scale study which means that it is not possible to make claims about generalization; however, we have used selected quotes to illustrate the empirical findings, in order to increase the 'credibility' of the research in this study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Thus, it is important to provide clear and rich descriptions so that others can decide the extent to which findings from one study are generalizable to another situation. Despite the limited amount of data, the results should be of relevance for other similar contexts. As such, the study contributes to the understanding of how the school-age educare practice can make a difference for children in areas with socioeconomic challenges.

Results

In the following sections, the school leaders' claims about the SAEC contribution to children residing in areas with socioeconomic challenges will be presented in terms of subjectification and qualification.

Subjectification

The conversations revealed nuanced pictures of children and childhood. In the analysis regarding claims about the child, three categories were identified: the child in need, the child at risk and the child with pluricultural experiences. These findings are presented below.

The Child in Need

Nuanced pictures of *the child in need* can be identified in the analysis. There are children who do not get their basic needs fulfilled, such as having enough food and sleep, since a lack of money and overcrowding at home seem to be common. In the narratives are examples of how SAEC can make a difference for these children by providing breakfast, extra snacks, fruit, and additional meals. The explanation is that "if children are not well, then they cannot learn". The following excerpt illustrates how the SAEC tries to adapt to the circumstances and needs of each child:

We can provide an extra snack for those [children] who arrive late. We can buy extra meals and keep them in the freezer if there are dishes that our children favor so that we can just take the dishes out and heat them. It is a very, very special treatment for many children so that they do not go hungry. Or feel bad, we know that they simply need extra [care]. It is a very important part for us and very many [children] have that need.

The above excerpt also shows that there are children who need extra care, in order for them to feel well. For these children, SAEC can be regarded as a safe place. A claim that is shared by most of the school leaders is well summarized in this excerpt:

After all, we have many pupils who have a tough time at home. That is how it is. It could be anything from living in a cramped space, being a large family with a small apartment, to having parents who don't work well as parents and becoming very isolated [the child]. So, the SAEC center is very important in our area. They [the children] are kept inside by their parents, because they [the parents] are worried that something will happen to them.

As illustrated above, there are children who are kept inside by their parents. Consequently, these children have limited access to activities. According to the school leaders, parents can lack money to pay for activities or no activities are available nearby, and some parents do not want their children to play outside due to risks in the neighborhoods. Enrollment in SAEC can give these children the opportunity to try out various activities:

[T]he children who live in poverty or something close to that. ... [just] to be able to play soccer in a team or to be able to play basketball or to be able to learn to play an instrument or whatever it is, these things are important when the parents can't afford it.

These claims made about the child in need seem to focus on basic needs and extra care. The school leaders' claims about the child reveal that children in socioeconomically challenged areas seem to need a secure place, caring professionals, and to be able to have new experiences. The claims are made in relation to both the children's poor home conditions and risks in the surrounding neighborhood. In line with Biesta's (2009) notion that education should impact on processes of subjectification, a possible interpretation of the examples above is that SAEC can offer the child a place to exist as a subject with other options than staying at home.

The Child at Risk

This category differs from the child in need insofar that it highlights some of the risks that children in areas with socioeconomic challenges are exposed to. Most of the school leaders claim that these children are at greater risk of growing up in extreme vulnerability, dropping out of school, and being socialized into criminal gangs, which supports previous research (Bunar & Ambrose, 2016; Wahlgren, 2014). It is not uncommon that these children also experience violence, drugs, and abuse in their homes.

Many of our children are not doing so well at home. It can be that they are dirty and messy. But it can also be that they are abused or things like that. It is very important for them to be among safe adults. School is their safe place, as well as SAEC.

The above excerpt illustrates how enrollment in SAEC is a way of keeping the children safe, to protect them from abuse or other harmful circumstances. Providing a safe environment is one of many reasons why school leaders give dispensation to children so that they can be enrolled in SAEC without parents having to pay the fee.

One of the school leaders describes the potential of SAEC to keep the children safe also by acting as a gatekeeper to safeguard them from the risks in the surrounding neighborhood. Most school leaders express worries about children hanging out in the city center, as all parents do not know where their children are or what they are doing at nighttime. School leaders' claims are unanimous about the reasons why these children are easy to recruit by gangs and why they should be enrolled in SAEC:

It's that easy for the gang criminals; they know exactly how to recruit them. And it's obvious if you live at home with eleven siblings, and you can't afford that jacket...//It's not difficult to understand. Of course they want some extra money, maybe for their family or for themselves or for sweets. That is why we need to have them here [in SAEC] so they don't get recruited.

I absolutely think that we contribute to the prevention of crime.

The claims made about the child in risk seem to focus on protection. The school leaders' claims about the child reveal that children in socioeconomically challenged areas seem to need a safe place with observant and gatekeeping professionals (cf. Swartz, 2009). The claims are partly made in relation to the children's home conditions, but mainly in relation to the children's exposure to risks concerning criminality. In line with Biesta's (2009) notion that education should impact on processes of subjectification, a possible interpretation of these conditions is that SAEC can offer the child a safe place and protection from risks in society.

The Child with Pluricultural Experiences

Significant for this category are descriptions of *the child with pluricultural experiences*. Two of the school leaders describe how parents are involved in creating a festival, which is a tradition in one of the schools. The festival serves as a meeting point to enrich the pluricultural experiences of both children and parents, showcasing the various cultures and languages represented in the school. However, the tension between promoting pluriculturalism and mediating the dominant culture (Åkerblom & Harju, 2021; Lunneblad, 2017) is evident in many of the school leaders' claims. This is expressed as:

Having an understanding of different cultures and being able to mix them in a good way, and how to incorporate Swedish culture while also benefiting from the cultures they come from. Then we need to relate to certain things here in Sweden, and how to work with that and not be afraid to have those discussions.

Ramadan and swimming are two areas that many school leaders highlight as a challenging balancing act, because many children seem restricted in their choices (c.f. Galante & dela Cruz, 2024). The school leaders stress the importance of the SAEC being able to provide the children with options in their learning or daily activities, expressed as: "we will give them the choices". According to the school leaders, activities free of charge are crucial for the majority of children living in areas with socioeconomic challenges. Therefore, many of the school leaders cooperate with other actors in the immediate area, such as sports clubs, the culture school that provides lessons in art, dance and music, and other associations, so that the children can try out new activities which might otherwise not be possible. An advantage of these kinds of activities is that they include multimodal learning (Wernholm, 2023), thereby relying less on verbal communication (Löthman & Puskas, 2024). This indicates that more children can participate and succeed. In the school leaders' narratives, examples are emerging of how participation in sports activities and inclusion in positive environments have made a difference:

That you get to be someone, that you can become *the hockey player Yosif*. You are no longer the one who messes around. You are a hockey player. And if you've become a hockey player, you can suddenly do things in a classroom that you've never been able to...//If they just gain this self-identity and this way of thinking about themselves, they'll fix things later. So, once they've grown a bit bigger and they know the language, they'll manage.

This excerpt illustrates the importance of making it possible for children to participate and succeed in areas other than school, since experiencing some success outside the classroom also seems to have an impact on these children's success in school.

The claims made about children with pluricultural experiences seem to focus on promoting identities as pluricultural individuals. The school leaders' claims are partly related to the challenging balancing act between promoting pluriculturalism and mediating the dominant culture, but mainly to promoting children's ability to make decisions. The SAEC strives to provide options in children's learning and daily activities, aiming for them to succeed and experience inclusion in positive environments. In line with Biesta's (2009) notion, education should impact on processes of subjectification. Therefore, it seems important to base education on children's own pluricultural lives. One possible interpretation of the examples above is that SAEC can enable each individual pupil to discover what makes them unique, which might empower them to participate in society by giving their best in responsible freedom—to make wise decisions.

Qualification

The school leaders' claims about how the SAEC helps qualify and prepare the children for the future are presented here as two categories: *qualification for further education* and *qualification for life*.

Qualification for Further Education

The analysis identified four aspects of how SAEC can contribute to qualifying the children for further education: by supporting the development of their self-esteem, by nourishing the development of soft skills, by supporting the development of children's language skills, and by designing learning activities that broaden their knowledge of the surrounding environment. These four aspects are highlighted by the

school leaders as crucial for the children to be able to leave primary school with passing grades, with developing their self-esteem considered to be a very essential aspect:

We must work a lot on their self-esteem, to make them feel that they have value, that they can succeed. And we also know that if they get passing grades, they will also have a greater chance of getting on in life.

The above excerpt illustrates the importance of supporting the development of children's self-esteem by helping them succeed. Many of the school leaders claim that the children thereby might gain status and respect in a school subject, and succeeding in school could enhance their chances of getting on well in life. These findings are well in line with research showing that at an early age, children are already sensitive to condescending attitudes and belittling treatment, which can reduce their self-esteem and performance (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2018).

Another aspect that is evident is that many of the children need to develop soft skills, since they have spent very little time or no time at all in preschool. This means that many children have limited, or might even lack, experiences of being included in institutional contexts or participating in early learning environments, which is illuminated in this excerpt:

They don't know how to take turns, to show consideration, to pay attention and listen, to join and walk in line, to move from point A to B. SAEC can help with that.

Some of these soft skills are shown to be necessary for succeeding in school (Ackesjö et al., 2022; Håkansson & Sundberg, 2016; Levin, 2013; Wernholm et al., 2024). Therefore, one important mission for the SAEC could be to offer children opportunities to train these skills in order to succeed with further education.

An additional aspect, which is a claim shared by all the school leaders, is the necessity to support the development of children's language skills for succeeding in school. The importance of the mother tongue (heritage language) is emphasized by several school leaders, for example, to ensure that they can communicate with relatives and maintain their cultural heritage. One of the school leaders gives an example of how SAEC can contribute:

We have many students who study their mother tongue. The municipality has teachers employed for this, and previously they came to us. Now some do, but others do not, so we have arranged it so that we accompany our students to the different schools where they are supposed to be. This practically means that we take educators from our own organization, but we do this to compensate for the parents who are not able to come here and pick them up and accompany them. We do this so that they can participate, because we think it is important

At the same time, claims are made regarding the importance of children learning Swedish. They need to be exposed to rich Swedish language environment and have opportunities to practice using it; their language needs are greater than those of children who have Swedish as their mother tongue. This is expressed as:

We have a language focus in the whole school, because we notice that our pupils are very bad at Swedish. Even when you are a third-generation immigrant, you have parents who don't speak or have this rich Swedish, which means that you cannot pass it on to your children. And you live in an area where you don't use the Swedish language, which makes it very difficult to get by in school where you get texts that require subject-specific vocabulary.

The above quote could be interpreted from a deficit perspective, suggesting that children need to be compensated based on their linguistic background according to the Swedish norm (Åkerblom & Harju, 2021; Bunar & Ambrose, 2016; Lund & Lund, 2016). However, it can also be interpreted with an awareness of what previous research has shown: that skills in the majority language and education in that language are crucial enablers of educational and, consequently, societal integration (Horgan et al., 2022; Suárez-Orozco, 2017). Many of the school leaders claim that participation in SAEC can develop children's language skills. SAEC might be the only place, apart from school, where children get a chance to practice their Swedish, which is important for passing grades in school:

What we identify as the major issue that our children [who are not enrolled in school-age educare] miss out on is the language [development]. And that has an impact on all subjects [in school]. So, if they were here and would be exposed to the Swedish language a longer time of the day, it would make a big difference.

It is here [school-age educare center] many of them practice their Swedish language. They do not do that otherwise.

The above examples also illustrate the importance of the teachers being fluent in Swedish, so that the children are exposed to rich Swedish. However, the advantages of having teachers who speak a variety of languages are also stressed by many of the school leaders, exemplified by this quote:

It is a comfort for children to be able to explain themselves or have things explained to them in their mother tongue when it is possible.

This aligns with research showing that access to instruction in one's best language is significant for multilingual pupils' literacy development, as well as their personal and cultural identity, emotional and social maturity, and cognitive development (Galante & dela Cruz, 2024). A reasonable interpretation is that these SAEC teachers can provide a caring relational climate where migrant children's identities and cultural belongings are valued.

The final aspect identified in the analysis concerns the claim that many of the children have limited or lack experiences of early learning environments and have spent most of their life in the residential area. Consequently, their knowledge of the school environment and the society is limited, which becomes problematic when they are introduced to new knowledge in school. This is illustrated in the following example:

Our pupils' world consists of the residential area, the school, and the mall. We see that many times the problem is that they don't have...any knowledge they can relate to and build upon [when they are introduced to new knowledge in school].

This explains why meaning-making might be difficult for many children. School leaders claim that SAEC can qualify children for further education by providing them with new experiences, such as trying out new activities and going on excursions, and through these measures, broadening their knowledge becomes possible.

The claims made about how SAEC contributes to qualify the children for further education seem to center around providing opportunities for the children to develop self-esteem, to train soft skills, to develop language skills, and to broaden their knowledge of their surrounding environment. The claims are made both in relation to the children's home conditions and in relation to the children's limited experiences of the world outside their residential areas. In accordance with Biesta's (2009) notion that education should provide children with the knowledge, skills, and understanding that will allow them to continue with future education, a possible interpretation of the examples above is that SAEC can help to qualify children to become knowledgeable and skillful in line with their peer group.

Qualification for Life

Two aspects can be identified in the analysis of how SAEC can contribute to children's qualification for life: to broaden children's horizons and to instill a belief in the future. As already mentioned, many of these children's world might be limited, and in this excerpt, the first aspect is illustrated how SAEC can make a difference for children's qualification for life by broadening their horizons:

We have pupils in preschool class...when we go to the central square in the middle of [city] which is the connecting point for all the buses, they ask: "What country are we in?"

This example reveals that being in the city center is a new life experience for the children. Although it might only be 15 minutes away, this experience seems to be so different that they think they are in another country. Thus, a shared claim is that SAEC can contribute to broadening the children's horizons, by taking them on excursions to discover and learn about the society beyond their residential area:

We collaborate with 4H farms; we make sure to take the children outside [the residential area] and show [them] that this also exists. Then they go home to their parents: "Do you know what we have seen? We have been to a 4H farm". And then the parents come here and ask how to get the bus there, and then we help them with that. And then suddenly we have families that start going on outings, not only to the mall, but they are also going to the 4H farm.

This example illuminates how SAEC not only can contribute to broaden the children's horizons, but also can apparently broaden the families' horizons by showing them new possibilities and helping them to get around in the community to experience something new. One of the school leader's narratives stands out in the empirical material insofar that this school leader has created a network and applied for government grants to get financial support to make it possible "to broaden the children's horizons". The real estate company, which has rental properties in the residential area, not only finances buses for taking the children to excursions, but also provides some financial support so that the children can get help with their homework. Moreover, all pupils who raise their grades get summer jobs at the real estate company. This SAEC center also shares facilities with the municipality, which offers free activities for people in the residential area, since these families often lack money to pay for activities or seldom have the possibility to take their children to activities outside the residential area.

Another aspect concerns SAEC being able to contribute to instilling a belief in the future. It is claimed that many of the children are growing up under very difficult life conditions, and they face many complexities in having to adapt to and navigate between different cultures. The narratives highlight that the children alternate their ways of acting, behaving, and speaking different languages. Moreover, the challenges with raising children in areas with serious crime is also addressed. All these issues are well summarized in this statement: *These children have an uphill battle*. Thus, all the school leaders stress the necessity of giving these children a belief in the future:

We still want to give the children a belief in the future. We want to show them that 'You can!'. Our school's vision is the joy of knowledge, a belief in the future. We can, we want, we dare and that is what we try to work with. We can give them a belief in the future. Together with the parents and that they [the children] should dare to explore and do things and be proud of who they are.

The example above illustrates how SAEC can contribute to helping children think about their future and be prepared for life. The SAEC contributes to the children's qualification for life by instilling in them a belief in the future.

The claims made about how SAEC contributes to qualifying the children for life seem to focus on instilling a belief in the future, by broadening the children's horizons and having them experience new opportunities. The claims are mainly made in relation to circumstances connected to the children's daily life in areas with socioeconomic challenges. According to Biesta (2000), education should provide children with the knowledge, skills, and understanding that will make it possible for them to act in the world; thus, a reasonable interpretation of the examples above is that SAEC can contribute to qualifying children for life by preparing them to handle and act in the world, knowing that they themselves will manage.

Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of this study was to explore how SAEC adapts to the circumstances and needs of pupils living in areas with socioeconomic challenges. It also examines how SAEC can contribute to promoting pupils' continued learning and knowledge development. This is achieved by analyzing school leaders' claims about children attending SAEC in these areas and their views on how SAEC should qualify and prepare children for further education and life.

This final section will first focus on how SAEC can make a difference for pupils in terms of subjectification by compensating for the conditions of their daily lives, according to the school leaders. Second, the discussion will address how the SAEC mission to complement the pupils' development can make a difference and contribute to their qualification. Third, the child with pluricultural experiences will be highlighted. Finally, the contribution of this study and school-age educare centers as potential arenas for crime prevention will be discussed.

First, the results show that school leaders are aware that many children *in these areas are growing up under very difficult life conditions*. The claims made by the school leaders indicate that children might be both in risk and in need. It is evident that the SAEC can compensate for what can be regarded as very basic needs, such as by providing breakfast, extra snacks and meals since there often is a lack of money at home.

It is also indicated that there are children who need extra care from engaged adults and that SAEC can be regarded as a safe place. These results seem to be well in line with the SAEC historical *social pedagogical tradition*, which is centered around a care-focused mission combined with attention to children's fostering and development and with an emphasis on humanistic aspects such as well-being and social development (Gustafsson Nyckel, 2020; Johansson, 1984; Paulsdóttir, 2012). It is evident, from the school leaders' perspectives, that SAEC can make a difference by compensating for the life conditions of the subject – the child. This is achieved by striving to fulfill basic needs such as providing food and a sense of safety. Although more emphasis has been placed on teaching and learning in SAEC (Andersson, 2013; Holmberg, 2018), its mission is still to provide care (Skolverket, 2022). One of the school leaders rightly claims: "If children are not well, then they cannot learn". In other words, children need to be fed and feel safe before they can start learning in school.

Second, the results in this study indicate that in a variety of ways, SAEC can complement the school and contribute to pupils' development in terms of qualification for further education and qualification for life. One needs to keep in mind that *these children have an uphill battle*. According to the school leaders' claims it is shown that, SAEC can make a difference by supporting the development of children's self-esteem, by making them feel that they have value and that they can succeed. From previous research, it is well known that it is essential to support young children and to strive towards helping them position themselves as learning subjects in different ways so that they develop a positive attitude towards education and identify strongly with the school (Ackesjö & Persson, 2021). Prior research also shows that young children's experiences of participating in early learning environments of high-quality influence their opportunities in life (Heckman, 2000). These results are partly confirmed in this study, in revealing what might be lacking in young children who have no prior experience of participating in early learning environments or institutional contexts. The school leaders claim that many of the children need to develop soft skills, such as knowing how to take turns, showing consideration, paying attention and listening, and joining and walking in line. Usually, children learn these skills in preschool, and these skills are shown to matter for succeeding in school and in life (Levin, 2013). Here, SAEC can make a difference for children's qualification by training these soft skills.

Third, *the child with pluricultural experiences* is evident in the school leaders' claims. It is not very surprising that the school leaders state that most children in their schools lack the language skills required for success in school and life. This is due to a clear correlation between areas with socioeconomic challenges, a majority of low-income households, and households with a foreign background and mother tongue (Boverket, 2023). The issue is not that children 'lack language'; they lack proficiency in Swedish, the instructional language in school. By stating that children lack language, the school leaders risk upholding a deficit view of children (cf. Åkerblom & Harju, 2021; Bunar & Ambrose, 2016; Lund & Lund, 2016). However, this study presents a more nuanced picture. While it is suggested that children, from a deficit perspective, need to be compensated based on their linguistic background according to the Swedish norm (cf. Åkerblom & Harju, 2021; Bunar & Ambrose, 2016; Lund & Lund, 2016), several school leaders *also* emphasize the importance of children practicing and developing their mother tongue (heritage language). This ensures they can communicate with relatives, maintain their cultural heritage, and learn school subjects, which aligns with previous research (Little, 2020). It is concluded that SAEC can make important contributions by focusing on developing *both* the Swedish language and children's mother tongue. In this way, the school leaders' claims seem to balance Biesta's (2022) notions of subjectification, giving children the opportunity to exist as subjects of their own pluricultural life, while also addressing the school's educational mission, which risks making the child an object of what others want from them.

Finally, one issue that has not been very prominent in previous studies, which is a contribution of this study, is that many of these children have limited knowledge of their surrounding environment as well, since they have spent most of their life in their residential area. Due to their limited experiences, they are short of concepts and consequently lack knowledge they can relate to and build upon when they meet new knowledge in school. SAEC can complement the school by providing the children with new and rich experiences, such as going on excursions and offering other outdoor activities. Thus, SAEC can truly make

a difference for children's qualification for life by broadening their horizons, so that they get to discover the world beyond their residential areas. Many of the school leaders stress the necessity of giving these children a belief in the future, exposing them to the idea that it is possible to have a future beyond their residential area if they want. This view is well in line with Biesta (2000), arguing that education should provide children with the knowledge, skills, and understanding that will make it possible for them to act in the world. In this way, the children choose to exist as a subject of their own life, not as the object of what other people want from them (Biesta, 2022), which could be the case if they are otherwise recruited to criminal activities.

According to previous studies, the school is often highlighted as a protective factor, as it is one of society's most important crime prevention actors (Lindbäck, 2021; Sandahl, 2021). This role is strengthened by the results in this study, which point to the SAEC as being a crime prevention actor of importance. Most school leaders claim that children who live in areas with socioeconomic challenges are at a greater risk of growing up in extreme vulnerability, dropping out of school, and being recruited by criminal gangs. These are reasons why there might be a greater need to have these children enrolled in SAEC, in order to protect them from abuse and from exposure to risks concerning criminality. The results highlight why some children, due to their life conditions, are easy to recruit to criminal gangs. It is not difficult to understand that they also would like some extra money for themselves or for their family, new clothes, a new cell phone, etc. But saying 'no' to doing a small favor, which is often the starting point for being recruited, means that the children must decline an offer that is so attractive for the moment. It is most likely that the children know that this might be their only chance of getting what they want, because they will not get it from their parents. If the children also have already failed to succeed in school, which according to previous research is common in areas with socioeconomic challenges (Lindbäck, 2012; Valizadeh, 2023), they might find the criminal gang attractive, as it offers a community where one can feel a sense of belonging, with the possibility of becoming someone and becoming rich by earning "easy" money. Therefore, more children in these areas should, according to the school leaders, be enrolled in SAEC with observant and gatekeeping professionals. This aligns well with previous research, which states that the SAEC focus on pupils' social relations, companionship, and community is an important mission (Hippanen Ahlgren, 2021; Johansson, 1984). Just like many of the school leaders, we argue that enrollment in SAEC could contribute to preventing children's early involvement in crime.

To sum up, in prior research, either a school in crisis or an increasing and more serious criminality among youth in disadvantaged areas has been highlighted. These negative images have seldom been linked to each other, but in recent research there is a growing interest in the school-crime relationship (eg. Sandahl, 2021), with attention on how the social context shapes individual behavior (Lindbäck, 2021; Sandahl, 2021). This study is in the same vein, by highlighting what growing up in a residential area with socioeconomic challenges might mean for children's life conditions. This study contributes with nuanced descriptions of how the SAEC mission to compensate and complement is claimed to be put into practice. One conclusion is that school-age educare centers can make a difference for children's life conditions and prerequisites for succeeding in school, which is also stated by one of the school leaders: *We can make a difference!* Another conclusion is that school-age educare centers emerge as potential arenas for crime prevention, which we suggest should be further explored in future studies.

Declarations

Authors' Declarations

Acknowledgements: We wish to thank the participating school leaders. We are also grateful to Susan Canali for the language check and Jens Gardesten for participating in the data gathering.

Authors' contributions: Conceptualization, M.W. and H.A., methodology, H.A and M.W., validation, H.A and M.W., formal analysis, M.W. and H.A., data curation, M.W. and H.A., writing – original draft preparation, M.W and H.A., writing–review and editing, MW and HA., project administration, H.A., funding acquisition, H.A. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Competing interests: The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Funding: The research was funded by PEPP (Forskning om pedagogiska professioner och praktiker) and UiF (Utbildning i Förändring)

Ethics approval and consent to participate: The study was conducted in accordance with ethical guidelines stated by Swedish Research Council regarding requirements related to information, consent, anonymity, and the right to withdraw from the project.

Publisher's Declarations

Editorial Acknowledgement: The editorial process of this article was completed under the editorship of Dr. Mehmet Toran through a double-blind peer review with external reviewers.

Publisher's Note: Journal of Childhood, Education & Society remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliation.

References

- Ackesjö, H., & Haglund, B. (2021). Fritidspedagogisk undervisning: En fråga om intentionalitet, situationsstyrning och inbäddning. *Utbildning & lärande*, 15(1), 69-87.
- Ackesjö, H., & Persson, S. (2021). *Forskningsöversikt i betänkandet En tioårig grundskola, SOU 2021:33 [bilaga 3, s. 579-632]*. Utbildningsdepartementet.
- Ackesjö, H., Lindqvist, P., & Nordäng, U-K. (2020). De första åren i yrket: Nyutexaminerade lärares upplevelser av en ny yrkesroll. In B. Haglund, J. Gustafsson Nyckel, & K. Lager (Eds.), *Fritidshemmets pedagogik i en ny tid* (pp. 101-117). Gleerups.
- Ackesjö, H., Wernholm, M., & Gardesten, J. (2022). Mjuka förmågor-vad är det och vad kan det bidra till?. In H. Ackesjö & B. Haglund (Ed.), *Perspektiv på fritidshemmets pedagogiska uppdrag* (pp. 57-68). Ifous.
- Åkerblom, A., & Harju, A. (2021). The becoming of a Swedish preschool child? Migrant children and everyday nationalism. *Children's Geographies*, 19(5), 514-525. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14733285.2019.1566517>
- Andersson, B. (2013). *Nya fritidspedagoger: i spänningsfältet mellan tradition och nya styrformer* [Doctorate thesis]. Umeå University.
- Audain, I. (2016). Informal extended education in Scotland. An overview of school age childcare. *International Journal for Research on Extended Education*, 4(2), 137-142. <https://doi.org/10.3224/ijree.v4i2.25786>
- Biesta, G. (2009). 'Good education in an age of measurement: On the need to reconnect with the purpose of education'. *Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability*, 21(1), 22-46. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11092-008-9064-9>
- Biesta, G. (2017). *The rediscovery of teaching*. Routledge.
- Biesta, G. (2018). Creating spaces for learning or making room for education? New parameters for the architecture of education. In H.M. Tse, H. Daniels, A. Stables & S. Cox (Eds.), *Designing buildings for the future of schooling: Contemporary visions for education* (pp. 27-40). Routledge.
- Biesta, G. (2022). *World-centered education*. Routledge.
- Boverket. (2023, August 27). Boendesegregationen i Sverige. <https://www.boverket.se/sv/samhallsplanering/boendesegregation/sverige/>
- Bryman, A. (2016). *Social Research Methods* (4th edition). Oxford University Press.
- Bunar, N., & Ambrose, A. (2016). Schools, choice and reputation: Local school markets and the distribution of symbolic capital in segregated cities. *Research in Comparative and International Education*, 11(1), 34-51. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745499916631064>
- Delegationen mot segregation. (2021). *Segregation i Sverige: Årsrapport 2021 om den socioekonomiska boendesegregationens utveckling*. Delegationen mot segregation.
- Farrell, A.F., Collier-Meek, M.A., & Furman, M.J. (2019). Supporting out-of-school time staff in low resource communities: A professional development approach. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 63(3-4), 378-390. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ajcp.12330>
- Galante, A., & dela Cruz, J. W. N. (2024). Plurilingual and pluricultural as the new normal: An examination of language use and identity in the multilingual city of Montreal. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 45(4), 868-883. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2021.1931244>
- Guilmette, M., Mulvihill, K., Villemare-Krajden, R., & Barker, E.T. (2019). Past and present participation in extracurricular activities is associated with adaptive self-regulation of goals, academic success, and emotional wellbeing among university students. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 73, 8-15. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lindif.2019.04.006>
- Gustafsson Nyckel, J. (2020). Vägen mot det undervisande fritidshemmet. In B. Haglund, J. Gustafsson Nyckel & K. Lager (Eds.), *Fritidshemmets pedagogik i en ny tid* (pp. 56-77). Gleerups.
- Haglund, B. (2015). Everyday practice at the Sunflower: The staff's representations and governing strategies as contributions to the order of discourse. *Education Inquiry*, 6(2), 209-229. <https://doi.org/10.3402/edui.v6.25957>

- Håkansson, J., & Sundberg, D. (2016). *Utmärkt skolutveckling: Forskning om skolförbättring och måluppfyllelse*. Natur & Kultur.
- Halpern, R. (2000). The promise of after-school programs for low-income children. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 15(2), 185-214. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0885-2006\(00\)00056-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0885-2006(00)00056-9)
- Heckman, J.J. (2000). *Invest in the very young*. Ounce of Prevention Fund and the University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy.
- Heckman, J.J., & Kautz, T. (2013). *Fostering and measuring skills: Interventions that improve character and cognition*. The National Bureau of Economic Research.
- Hippanen Ahlgren, A. (2021). *Lärare i fritidshems undervisningskunskap: undervisningshandlingar i interaktion mellan lärare och barn* [Doctorate thesis]. Stockholm University.
- Holmberg, L. (2018). *Konsten att producera lärande demokrater* [Doctorate thesis]. Stockholm University.
- Horgan, D., Martin, S., O'Riordan, J., & Maier, R. (2022). Supporting Languages: The socio-educational integration of migrant and refugee children and young people. *Children & Society*, 36(3), 369-385. <https://doi.org/10.1111/chso.12525>
- Johansson, I. (1984). *Fritidspedagog på fritidshem. En yrkesgrupps syn på sitt arbete* [Doctorate thesis]. Göteborgs University.
- Koyuncu, S., Kumpulainen, K., & Kuusisto, A. (2023). Scaffolding children's participation during teacher-child interaction in second language classrooms. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 68(4), 750-764. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00313831.2023.2183430>
- Kuchartz, U., & Rädiker, S. (2023). *Qualitative content analysis* (2nd Ed). Sage.
- Lager, K. (2018). Att undervisa i fritidshem: omsorg, lärande och utveckling i en helhet. *Educare*, (2), 51-68. <https://doi.org/10.24834/educare.2018.2.3>
- Lazzari, A., Balduzzi, L., Van Laere, K., Bodury, C., Rezek, M., & Prodgeret, A. (2020). Sustaining warm and inclusive transitions across the early years: Insights from the START Project. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 28(1), 43-57. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1350293X.2020.1707361>
- Levin, B. (2013). The utility and need for incorporating noncognitive skills into large-scale educational assessments. In M. von Davier (Eds.), *The role of international large-scale assessments: perspectives from technology, economy, and education research* (pp. 67-86). Springer.
- Lincoln, Y., & Guba, E.G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Sage.
- Lindbäck, J. (2021). *Värsta bästa skolan* [Doctorate thesis]. Gothenburg University.
- Little, S. (2020). Whose heritage? What inheritance?: Conceptualising Family Language Identities. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 23(2), 198-212. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2017.1348463>
- Löthman, C., & Puskás, T. (2024). Pathways to educational integration: affordances and constraints on migrant children's participation in Swedish preschool teaching activities. *Early Years*. 1-16. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/09575146.2024.2412717>
- Ludvigsson, A., & Falkner, C. (2019). Fritidshem-ett gränsland i utbildningslandskapet. *Nordisk tidskrift för pedagogik och kritik*, 5, 13-16. <http://dx.doi.org/10.23865/ntpk.v5.1181>
- Lund, A., & Lund, S. (2016). Skolframgång och mångkulturell inkorporering. In A. Lund & S. Lund (Eds.), *Skolframgång i det mångkulturella samhället* (pp. 13-35). Studentlitteratur.
- Lunneblad, J. (2017). Integration of refugee children and their families in the Swedish preschool: strategies, objectives and standards. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 25(3), 359-369. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1350293X.2017.1308162>
- Mavroudi, E., & Holt, L. (2015). (Re)constructing nationalisms in schools in the context of diverse globalized societies. In T. Matesjkova & M. Antonsich (Eds.), *Governing through diversity: Migration societies in post-multiculturalist times* (pp. 181-200). Palgrave MacMillan.
- Memišević, A. (2024). *Det undervisande fritidshemmet i lärandets tidevarv* [Doctorate thesis]. Linköpings University.
- Øksnes, M., Knutas, A., Ludvigsson, A., Falkner, C., & Kjaer, B. (2014). Lekens rolle i skandinaviske skolefritidsordningen. *Barn*, 32(3), 107-123. <https://doi.org/10.5324/barn.v33i3.3504>
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2006). *Starting strong II: Early childhood education and care*. OECD.
- Pálsdóttir, K. (2014). The professional identity of recreational personnel. In A. Klerfelt & K. Pálsdóttir (Eds.), *Barn: Forskning om barn og barndom i Norden* (pp.75-89). Norsk senter for barneforskning.
- Petersen, P. (2020). *Delaktighet och digitala resurser* [Doctorate thesis]. Stockholm University.
- Plantenga, J., & Remery, C. (2017). Out-of-school childcare: Exploring availability and quality in EU member states. *Journal of European Social Policy*, 27(1), 25-39. <https://doi.org/10.1177/095892871667217>
- Polismyndigheten. (2021). *Lägesbild över utsatta områden. Regeringsuppdrag 2021*. Polismyndigheten, nationella operativa avdelningen.

- <https://www.studocu.com/sv/document/goteborgs-universitet/skatteratt-med-redovisning/lagesbild-over-utsatta-omraden-2021/61787694>
- Saar, T., Löfdahl, A., & Hjalmarsson, M. (2012). Kunskapsmöjligheter i svenska fritidshem. *Nordisk Barnehageforskning*, 5(3), 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.7577/nbf.315>
- Sandahl, J. (2021). Juvenile crime in context-the significance of school affiliation [Doctorate thesis]. Stockholm University.
- Skollag (SFS 2010:800). Utbildningsdepartementet. https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-och-lagar/dokument/svensk-forfattningssamling/skollag-2010800_sfs-2010-800/
- Skolverket. (2018). *Analys av familjebakgrundens betydelse för skolresultaten och skillnader mellan skolor*, rapport 467. Skolverket. <https://www.skolverket.se/download/18.6bfaca41169863e6a65d200/1553967875648/pdf3927.pdf>
- Skolverket. (2022). *Läroplan för grundskolan, förskoleklassen och fritidshemmet: Lgr 22*. Skolverket. <https://www.skolverket.se/undervisning/grundskolan/laroplan-och-kursplaner-for-grundskolan/laroplan-lgr22-for-grundskolan-samt-for-forskoleklassen-och-fritidshemmet>
- Skolverket. (2023). PISA 2022. Skolverket. <https://www.skolverket.se/getFile?file=12177>
- Slot, P. (2016). *Innovating the early years curriculum to prepare children for the 21st century*. Utrecht university.
- Suárez-Orozco, C. (2017). The diverse immigrant student experience: what does it mean for teaching?. *Educational Studies*, 53(5), 522-534. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131946.2017.1355796>
- Swartz, E. (2009). Diversity: Gatekeeping knowledge and maintaining inequalities. *Review of Educational Research*, 79(2), 1044-1083. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654309332560>
- Swedish Government Official Reports (2020a). *En mer likvärdig skola--minskad skolsegregation och förbättrad resurstilldelning*. (SOU 2020:28) Stockholm. <https://www.regeringen.se/contentassets/fcf0e59defe04870a39239f5bda331f4/en-mer-likvardig-skola--minskad-skolsegregation-och-forbattrad-resurstilldelning-sou-202028/>
- Swedish Government Official Reports (2020b). *Stärkt kvalitet och likvärdighet i fritidshem och pedagogisk omsorg. Betänkande av Utredning om fritidshem och pedagogisk omsorg*. (SOU 2020:34). Stockholm. <https://www.regeringen.se/contentassets/7302f489bbde433b958beedb7b1bdeff/starkt-kvalitet-och-likvardighet-i-fritidshem-och-pedagogisk-omsorg-sou-202034/>
- Valizadeh, C. (2023). "Vi som bär här-vi vet!" [Doctorate thesis]. Linnaeus University.
- Vetenskapsrådet. (2024). God forskningssed. [Elektronisk resurs], Reviderad utgåva. Vetenskapsrådet.
- Wahlgren, P. (2014). De laglydiga. Om skolans brottsförebyggande fostran [Doctorate thesis]. Linnaeus University.
- Wernholm, M. (2023). Undervisning i ett fritidshem för alla?. *Pedagogisk Forskning i Sverige*, 28(4), 64-88. <https://doi.org/10.15626/pfs28.04.03>
- Wernholm, M., Ackesjö, H., Gardesten, J., & Funck, U. (2024). Mjuka förmågor-ett sätt att begreppsliggöra arbetet med "det sociala" i fritidshemmet. In S. Lundmark & J. Kontio (Eds.), *Fritidsdidaktiska dilemman* (pp.63-88). Natur & Kultur.
- Wilkinson, R., & Pickett, K. (2018). *The inner level: How more equal societies reduce stress, restore sanity and improve everyone's well-being*. Allen Lane.