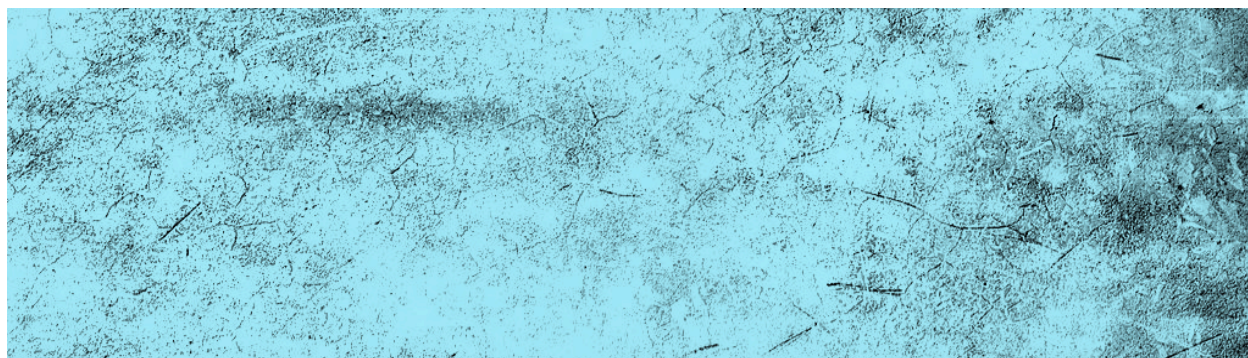


A Historical Overview: Care and Education Intersecting with Status and Class in Swedish Childminder Education 1975-2011

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PEER REVIEWED ARTICLE, VOL. 9(3) p. 1-16, PUBLISHED 28TH OF MARCH 2015



Abstract: From a perspective of status and class, this paper delineates changes in Swedish childminder education. The data are policy documents, documents from childminder training, and interviews with educators. The analysis is informed by post-structural theory. The study shows that the status of the childminder program has shifted between high and low status, and led toward differently classed life trajectories at different times. One reason for these variations is that the emphasis in childcare has shifted from care to teaching. This has at times increased the status of the education and the vocation, but also subverted the demand for childminders.

Keywords: Childminder education; Care and education; Status and class

Introduction

In Sweden, like most countries, there have always been two categories of childcare personnel: childminders and preschool teachers. The subject of this article is the education and vocational training of childminders. Childminders have historically been working as caregivers, whereas

preschool teachers have been working with education and the development of the children (Enö, 2005). This division of labor fortified a class division where childminders were subordinated to preschool teachers. With the Swedish preschool reform in the 1970s the division of labor ceased. The two categories of child workers remained but according to the new policy, they were supposed to work in teams sharing all tasks at the preschool, irrespective of position or formal education (1968 års Barnstugeutredning, 1972). Despite this, the training of childminders and preschool teachers continued to be divided. The childminder education was a vocational education and training at upper secondary level which was made into the first step of a child worker education. The second step, the preschool teacher education became an academic college education (1968 års Barnstugeutredning, 1975). According to the Pre-school Act *Education in Interplay* (Sw. Utbildning i samspel) both programs were expected to have similar content, and both preschool teachers and childminders were denominated ‘child pedagogues’ (1968 års Barnstugeutredning, 1975). The constitution of preschools as day care and the stress on teamwork in the 1970s has since the 1990s changed due to the present domination of an educational discourse in the constitution of preschools and the emphasis on preschool teachers as educators (Berntsson, 2004; Folke-Fichtelius, 2008). This has contributed to a subversion of how to make sense of the position and status of the childminder vocation. In this article we explore what becomes of childminder education during the period 1975-2011 when the discourse and the assignment changes from care to pedagogy. How is the childminder training constructed as an upper secondary program? How is it constituted in relation to other upper secondary programs and to preschool teacher training, and how does this contribute to attributions of status and class? In addressing these questions we explore how the intersection of a discourse of education with a discourse of care is made significant, and to what effects, in the training of childminders. The aim of the paper is to investigate how changes in the childminder program discursively constitute the program itself, and the subjects it produces, in terms of status and class.

The Swedish childminder and preschool

Below we will give a brief rendition of conditions for Swedish childcare and preschool which are of importance for how to make sense of how the training has been constituted in the time span of our study. One such condition is age integrated institutions. This differs from numerous countries, where childcare is age segregated, with one type of institution focused on care (e.g., family daycare, crèches, daycare centers, nurseries or pre-kindergarten) and the other focused on education (e.g., kindergarten, preschool) (Ackerman, 2004; Fielding & Moss, 2011; Gammage, 2010). However, this institutional division between care and education is now in many places changing in favor of a stronger emphasis on education and the integration between the two aspects (see e.g., Colley, 2010; Rockel, 2009; Zhu, 2008). The institutional division between the caring and educational aspects of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) has traditionally been manifested in two different categories of workers, with those focused on care having no or very limited training, and those focused on education having higher education at a bachelor level (Ackerman, 2004; Blank, 2010; Early & Winton, 2001; Norris, 2010; OECD, 2006).

In an international perspective, the concept “childminder” as it is used in the Swedish context, can seem confusing. Since the Swedish preschool reform in the 1970s childminder is the term for one category of preschool personnel, which is (or are expected to be) trained at upper

secondary level, and together with preschool teachers work with children aged 0-6 (1968 års Barnstugeutredning, 1975). Outside Sweden, a more common way to denominate this kind of staff is *assistant*: e.g. child assistant, childcare assistant, teacher assistant or just assistant (OECD, 2006). The concept childminder is instead used for family daycare personnel, and these childminders have mostly no training (OECD, 2006). In spite of this, we have chosen to use the term childminder and we have two arguments for our choice: First, it is close to the Swedish term *barnskötare*, and second, Swedish childminders do not have the role of an assistant as they work in teams where everybody is supposed to take part in all tasks. The vocation was created in a time characterized by notions of equality and side by side with the preschool teachers, childminders work with all children between 0 and 6 years (1968 års Barnstugeutredning, 1972). This way of organizing the preschool practices is related to a notion, which also is stated in the Preschool Act, that there is no clear distinction between care and education in Swedish preschools (1968 års Barnstugeutredning, 1972; Halldén, 2009; 2007). In spite of the changes in the discourses concerning the preschool, this conception of the association between education and care is more or less constant.

The inherent tension between care and education points to different aims for the preschool. In the 1970s “preschool” became the official term for the legally based way of organizing daycare. It was part of a family policy that promoted women to enter the labor market. It was a social project, although with pedagogical ambitions. However, in everyday talk, it was called “*day home*” (Sw. *daghem*), which points to its main purpose for parents (Halldén, 2009; 2007), i.e. a place where children were taken care of by professional child workers when their parents were at work. This was further emphasized by the fact that the preschools until 1998 were supervised by the social authorities of the municipalities. From 1998 and onward preschools fall under the auspices of the school authorities. Despite the shift from “day home” to “preschool”, the aspect of looking after their children while the parents are working is still important.

The above rendition of changes in the preschool discourse serves two purposes: first, it is important in relation to changes in the training of childminders which takes place in a context of both discourses concerning childcare and in preschool practices. Second, during the first twenty years of the time span of this study, day-home was the most common concept. It was subsequently gradually superseded both by the concept preschool and the concomitant emphasis on education.

Childminders and/or child assistants – a female low-status vocation

The OECD review of early childhood education and care in twenty countries, *Starting Strong II* (OECD, 2006), presents an overview of ECEC staff training in the OECD countries. It evinces that, in most countries, staff working in education, as teachers or pedagogues, are trained in higher education, whereas staff working in care get either no training at all or only a secondary vocational education (OECD, 2006). Looking at research about training and education of childminders and preschool teachers, with the reservation that the boundary is not always definite, we have found that preschool teacher education is a field that has attracted considerably more attention than childminder education. For example, when Cochran presents a comparison between the educations of child workers in different countries, he looks only at the education of preschool teachers (Cochran, 2011). One obvious explanation for this omission is the absence of childminder training in most countries (OECD, 2006).

There is consequently a conspicuous lack of studies of childminder education. In 1998 the Swedish Agency of Education presented an evaluation of the upper secondary program that at that time contained the childminder training (Skolverket, 1998b). It shows that the program *Child and Leisure* initially, in the mid-90s, was popular, but the interest rapidly declined. The students who entered the program received lower grades than students in more academic programs, but their grades were slightly higher than those in other vocational programs.

One exception to the lack of research about the childminder program is a Swedish study of teachers who teach in the Child and Leisure program (Lemar, 2001). The study evinces that although the teachers had a high regard for the program in terms of its content and demands, they were aware that it was considered a low-status program in relation to other programs at the upper-secondary school. This was also confirmed by students in the program (Lemar, 2001). The teachers in the study attributed the low status to a general deprecation of the program in the media, among students, and in society in general. The teachers claimed that the program's low status kept away ambitious students who would otherwise be interested and able to appreciate its content. According to Lemar, the Child and Leisure program then became a way out for less ambitious students who demanded a lot from the teachers and who reinforced the low status of the program. Korp's study (2006) on assessment, tests and social reproduction in four upper-secondary school programs includes the Child and Leisure program. According to Korp, the students were aware of notions from other students that their program was considered easy-going with low expectations from the teachers. Korp attributes this to the educational forms and methods that prepare the students for occupational work, rather than further studies. Many of the students showed little interest in their grades together with low motivation for their studies. A lot of the students who were assessed as low motivated in Korp's study were boys who did not have Child and Leisure as their first choice. Korp interprets their resistance against studying, and what she calls the program's middle-class femininity, as a gender issue. Korp's comparison with two academic upper-secondary programs, highlight differences in preparations, expectations and also in the status. The Child and Leisure program was placed on a lower level in an implicit educational hierarchy because of the non-abstract, and female related content and associations (Korp, 2006).

The conception of Child and Leisure as a low-status program has also served as a precondition for the decision to use it as a site for at least two studies of gender and class (Ambjörnsson, 2004; Johansson, 2003). Ambjörnsson (2004) used the program as a site to demonstrate how working class or lower class teenage girls constructed class. The study is similar to Beverly Skeggs' study of gender and class among British working class women, which also focused on women in care education (Skeggs, 1997). In these studies it is not the program as such that is the object of study, but how it, as a taken for granted gendered working-class site, contributes to constitutions of gender and class of the students.

The above studies show that the childminder educations in previous studies have been constructed as low status educations. In this article we use this as both point of departure and as something we want to question. Has the education of childminders always been seen as low status, and how is this constitution of the program in terms of status achieved?

Previous research points to a general need for research on childminder education—and the childminder vocation—and also to a specific need to critically analyze the connections between childminder education and low status.

The study

In order to make visible different discourses concerning the aim and content of childminder education we have analyzed national policy documents, data from one local childminder education program, and interviewed three very experienced childminder teachers. The national policy documents we have used are for instance the Pre-school Act 1972 and 1975 (1968 års Barnstugeutredning, 1975) and National Curricula for Childminder education (Skolöverstyrelsen, 1971) and the Child and Leisure program (Utbildningsdepartementet, 1994). The local data consist of archive materials from the local childminder programs from 1975 to 2010. We have read minutes from student welfare conferences, student rolls, curricula, lists of literature, schedules, report cards, minutes from classes and teacher conferences, as well as admittance statistics. The material is not comprehensive; there are gaps due to what the programs have decided to save in their files. We have interviewed three teachers who were, and in some cases still are key persons in the education program. Together, they have taken part in the program as teachers and managers since the beginning of the 1980s. The first interviewee, Int. 1, has been a teacher in the childminder program since 1983 and is currently responsible for Child and Leisure at her school. In addition she was herself a childminder student in the 1970s. The second interviewee, Int. 2, started to teach in the program in 1991. She subsequently became responsible not only for the program as such, but also for implementing the move of the program from the vocational upper secondary school for care workers to the general upper secondary school and the concomitant reforms of the content of the program. She has furthermore written a master thesis about The Child and Leisure program. The third interviewee, Int. 3, was a teacher of childminders 1986-2005. She has served as head of the program and responsible for implementing the different reforms that the program was obliged to go through in this time span, as well as principal for the whole school. Together with the archival data the interviews served as a foundation to map the existence of parallel and competing discourses about the aim, content, and significance of the childminder education program. We made the first interview early in the project in order to get guidance into important areas of the education from the 1970s until today. This made it possible for us to discuss our preliminary interpretations of the archive data and the documents we had read. This process was repeated as we reread the documents and made new interviews. The interviews were semi-structured and at each interview we asked new questions, since we had progressed in the analysis. During this process we also explored national documents and reports concerning the childminder education and preschool policy documents.

In the analysis we have focused on how the content, aim, and significance of childminder education are constituted by different actors in different contexts. We see the archival data and the interviews as different forms of articulations and materializations of the childminder education. They are both complementary and connected to each other. Data from the archives raises questions for the interviews and what we learn from the interviews prompts us to go back to the archives, and so forth.

Theoretical perspectives

Our analysis of the education of childminders is informed by post-structural critical discourse theory, which points to dominating norms and hegemonic discourses as articulations in the form of texts, utterances, and practices (Butler, 2004; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985; Torfing, 1999). This

means that the analysis is focused on how the education and the childminder vocation are constituted in texts, talk, and practices. The main analytical questions are; how is the status of the education, and of the role, of childminders constituted, and how is the relation between care and education, and between childminders and preschool teachers, constituted in childminder education?

Based on the hierarchical relation between childminders and preschool teachers, and how previous research has pointed to the childminder (and the Child and Leisure) program as a program with low status, we have analyzed the data from a perspective of status and class. We see the two concepts *status* and *class* as highly interconnected, although class, in line with a more Weberian perspective, pertains to situations where groups and individuals have and/or are attributed different economic “life chances” (Weber, Roth, & Wittich, 1978), whereas status is a purely relational concept that positions subjects and practices in hierarchical order. We want to stress that classed relations always are contingent and situational. In this study we have therefore focused on how the childminder training contributes to constitutions of class and status in relation not only to the preschool education, but also to where it takes place, to other upper secondary programs, and to the background and future prospects of the students. We are partly indebted to Bourdieu’s claim that phenomena, institutions, social groups, or individuals are attributed differing statuses based on recognition of different forms of *economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital* (Bourdieu, 1984). Although we employ a similar perspective to Bourdieu’s, we are critical of how his theory tends to result in stable conceptions of class (see e.g., Ambjörnsson, 2004; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Walkerdine, Lucey, & Melody, 2001) and at the same time runs the risk of obfuscating the economic consequences—for collectives and individuals—of attributions of class. In line with a perspective informed by discourse theory we regard class as an open and contingent construction rather than a defined category. Our interest is in exploring how practices (childminder education), institutions (where the education takes place as well as the preschool), and subjects (childminders) are interpellated into differently classed positions (Butler, 1992; Youdell, 2006), i.e., positions that entail differing prospects in terms of economy, agency, and the influence of work conditions.

Swedish childminder education

In this section, which constitutes the first step in the analysis of the different sets of data, we will give a brief description of some important aspects and changes in Swedish childminder education. At the inception of the period 1975–2011, childminder education was one of several upper-secondary vocational programs for care workers, including hospital and medical staff such as assistant nurses, child nurses, and mental orderly. The childcare reform in 1977 strongly emphasized the development of the child as a democratic social being. This was a major break with the former discourse of childcare in terms of health, hygiene, and personal care. It also resulted in a change from child nurse training to childminder training, where education came to dominate at the expense of care. The difference between childminder education and preschool teacher education thereby became less evident as both drew on the same discourse, a discourse focused on pedagogy. The Preschool Act did not indicate any clear differences between either the aim nor content in the childminder and preschool teacher education programs. The former was just described as the first step on an educational staircase, and the latter as the second (1968 års barnstugeutredning, 1975). Not everyone approved of this lack of distinction. An opinion given by

the *National Agency of Education* highly criticized the ambition to form two educations with almost the same aim and content, at different educational levels (Skolöverstyrelsen, 1976).

During the 1980s, childminder education was used for labor market purposes. In addition to special, shorter programs directed at unemployed adults there were special programs that aimed to raise the quality of registered family childcare and to train those who worked as untrained childminders. The demand for child workers had increased due to a political decision to provide daycare for all children from the age of 1. Interviewee 3 recounted that at this time she simultaneously administered 14 parallel versions of the childminder education. In connection with a national reform of secondary schools in 1994, childminder education was broadened and became Child and Leisure, which also encompass leadership for leisure time activities. It meant that childminder education was separated from the care context to which it had belonged (Lemar, 2001). This was also a means to attract more boys to the program in order to make it more gender equal (Skolverket, 1998b). Another major change was that there was no longer any specific vocational degree for childminders. From 2011, the Child and Leisure program, in which becoming a childminder is one of several choices, prepares students for work or study in the fields of care, social work, preschool, and leisure activities and can also provide eligibility for higher education (Skolverket, 2011b).

Below, we analyze and discuss childminder education, looking first at the tension between discourses of care and discourses of education in the program and then at how status and class have fluctuated during the time span of the study. In the conclusion, we will finally discuss the differing perceptions of the childminder training in terms of discourses of sameness or discourses of difference.

Tension between care and education

The childminder and preschool teacher education programs are constructed together with discourses and policies concerning childcare and preschool. The preschool act provided policy and aims for both childminder and preschool teacher educations. The new and dominant idea accompanying childcare reform in Sweden in the 1970s was of an institution where children were together in sibling groups with mixed ages, and education and care were naturally intertwined (1968 års Barnstugeutredning, 1972). Halldén (2007; 2009) has pointed to the changing, and also sometimes complicated relations between education and care in the Swedish preschool. According to her, the main discourse since the reform in the 1970s is that education and care constitute a whole, although the question of care has been more or less obfuscated since the 1990s when preschool has been increasingly associated with education. This is affirmed by Lindgren (2001), who shows that care is hardly mentioned in official and policy documents from the 1970s and onward. Even though, the implementation of the reform followed this agenda the connection and valuation of the concepts fluctuate. The conception of ECEC introduced by Noddings argues that care is decisive and fundamental in education (Noddings, 1993). She describes care as an ethical relation defined as taking “responsibility for the growth of another” (Noddings, 1993). This is akin to the concept of education in the Swedish childcare reforms from the 1970s onward, although the perspective is reversed (Lindgren, 2001). Education is described as a means to help children grow as citizens and individuals. This indicates that, although care is not explicitly mentioned, it is included in the notion of education. The aim of this pedagogy could be characterized as social, rather than as educational in the traditional sense (cf. OECD, 2006; Sandin & Halldén, 2003). In

the context of Swedish childcare and ECEC discourse, it is obvious that care and education are related to each other and form a whole, not least in comparison with elementary school discourses, where educational perspectives dominate (Johansson & Pramling Samuelsson, 2001; Halldén, 2007).

The history of childminder education in Sweden can be seen as a materialization of a continuous discussion between how to make sense of the concepts of care and education in the context of childcare. Following the childcare reforms in 1977, the curriculum began to emphasize education at the expense of care, and children's nurse education became separate from childminder education, where the former was supposed to train people to work in health care and the latter in child care. The childminder program became step 1 in the education of so called child pedagogues. The preschool act stated the same aims and content for childminder education and preschool teacher education (1968, Barnstugeutredningen 1975, 123). The aim was stated as to assist the development of children from "...the point of departure of sociological contexts and socialpsychological views based on development psychology, education and sociology" (133). There is no mentioning of goals pertaining to care (cf. Lindgren 2001). This is also evident in the suggested curriculum which did not include any subjects concerning health and care (ibid. 133-135, 146-158, 161). The discursive move from care to education that informs the dominant discourse on child care was repeated and affirmed also in our interviews. Although our informants were in favor of the shift from healthcare to education, the interviews evince that this took time and was not done without resistance. Informant 3 recounts how she in her development assignment to reform the program according to the national curriculum encountered severe resistance from child healthcare teachers in the program who strived to maintain the program as an education dominated by a combination of daycare and child healthcare (Int 3). The resistance against the emphasis on education was further strengthened, according to the same informant, by the student's expectations. She states: "Still, you had a body of students consisting of nice girls who entered the program expecting to learn how to take care of children" (Int 3). Despite the emphasis on education, the program continued to be staffed by care teachers who continued to act as if it was predominantly a care-oriented program (Int.2, 3). In addition, the program was situated in an institution of other care worker education programs. Consequently, within the program, at least at the schools of our informants, there was tension between two discourses: a discourse of care and a discourse of education. Although the content and curriculum of the program shifted direction from care to education (or pedagogy), the program continued to nationally be located in schools for different types of care workers until 1994, when it was moved to the general upper-secondary school. This move can be seen as a further stabilization of a discourse that stressed education (Int.2, 3). One symbolic change that one interviewee mentioned concerned the room where the students used to practice bathing and other caring activities. Following the move to the ordinary upper-secondary school, there was no longer such a room (Int.2). This relocation consequently stabilized the change from care to education in a concrete and material way.

The conception of pedagogy that signifies ECEC, i.e., a caring pedagogy, influenced the teaching practice which was characterized by a caring attitude (Int.1,2,3). Teaching, in this perspective, is not restricted to instructing students in particular subjects. As Noddings states, it is characterized by good contact, dialogue, and a sense of how to meet students' needs (Noddings, 1993). When childminder education took place alongside several other vocational programs for caring occupations, the teaching-caring practices were the norm. The local documents evince

dedication in the personal growth of the students. Several minutes recount how the school express extensive concern for truant students, and adapt the studies to students with difficulties due to lack of ambition, language skills or social circumstances (TSA, A3a). One example of this caring attitude is a protocol stating that a student has difficulties in her studies, but will remain in the program with extra support, while the school assists helping her to find a job (A 5:1, 1978-1985, 1975-10-26). Although all of our informants talk about this as a strong point and a sign of progressive pedagogy, they show awareness that, in relation to more theoretical programs, the Child and Leisure program has been perceived as an inferior education program. Even if the teachers in the program practice a caring pedagogy (Noddings 1993), care as content in the program is gradually defused (cf. Lemar, 2001; Skolverket, 1998b).

The attribution of low status to care in relation to education has affected childminder education and its students. The program is on a lower educational level than preschool teacher education. Care, in this case, together with work directed at the youngest children and requiring a shorter education, contributes to a devaluation of the childminder vocation in relation to preschool teachers (OECD, 2006).

From high to low status

The difference between the training and vocation of childminders and preschool teachers is not only a matter of educational content and the tasks connected with the two vocations, but also of status and class. The shifts between high and low status of the program during the time span of our study (cf. Lemar, 2001; Skolverket, 1998b) correspond to shifts with respect to its role as an education program leading toward differently classed life trajectories.

At the time of the preschool reform in 1977, childminder education comprised a highly coveted two-year program that required high grades for admission. In 1981 there were 116 first hand applicants to 49 positions (Intagningsnämnden 1981, Utbildnings- och kulturförvaltningen vol A5A:1). The archival data evinces that differing from other care vocation programs almost all students were high-performing females. The program's demand for high grades and the positive life trajectory that it seemed to promise, constituted it as a high-status program at the upper secondary schools, where education in care vocations took place (Gustavsson, 2007). According to our informants, and in line with the general intention for training of childcare personnel (1968 års Barnstugeutredning, 1975), the program was regarded as a first step to becoming a preschool teacher, which at the time was seen as a relatively high-status vocation, since it played an essential role in the progressive movement towards a more gender-equal society. This also constructed it as a program that offered a positive life trajectory with good prospects in terms of wages, influence in one's work, and career possibilities. Together this constituted the program and its students in a middle class, or on their way to a middle class, position.

In connection with the recession at the beginning of the 1980s, with high general unemployment rates on the one hand and a continuous demand for personnel in the expanding childcare sector on the other, the education of childminders was modified and used as a resource by employment services. In order to put people to work, shorter childminder programs, ranging in length from one to four semesters, were arranged. Most of these courses were directed at unemployed adults (TSA, vol. A8, Int. 3). These parallel programs of different lengths constituted childminder education as a fluid educational stream with no clear boundaries for what the vocation actually demanded (Gustavsson, 2007). The shorter versions of the program can be seen

as articulations of a discourse concerning vocational training of child workers as less important and demanding. Anyone, with life experience, could qualify for the vocation with only a semester or so of training. In this way the alternative programs subverted the rationality of the ordinary program. The local documents we have studied also indicate that at this time there was an increase in students who left the program before graduating or who required extra support in order to complete their studies (TSA, vol. A3a). Educators consequently faced a change in conditions, no longer working with a student body composed mainly of what the teachers perceived as highly motivated students but instead with a large proportion of students with low motivation. Together these changes constituted the program as low status, which could not offer favorable future prospects for the students.

A reflection we have made is that later reforms can be seen as articulations of a discourse of gender equality. Official authorities regarded the scarcity of boys in the program as a problem; both for the program and for work with care and children in general (Utbildningsdepartementet, Prop 1990/91:85). In 1988, when the program was expanded on a trial basis to a three-year program, the schools assigned 20 percent of the places in the class to boys (TSA, vol. A8 Skolöverstyrelsen [SÖ] informerar 1988:10). Notes from teachers' conferences expressed concern for boys who cut class and discussed how to support them so that they could complete their studies (TSA, vol. A3a). These conferences constructed many of the male students in the program in the municipality we studied as with little or no motivation for studying (cf., Korp, 2006). This was repeated by all our informants. However, the relation between the one year extension of the program and attributions of status was ambiguous. At the same time as some male students were perceived as lowering the status of the program, the extension of the program to three years changed the character of the student body such that it was once more attracting high-performing and ambitious students—mostly female—who saw the childminder program as a means to simultaneously get vocational training and access to higher education. The former childminder program had been something of a dead end for students interested in higher education (Gustavsson, 2007). According to interviewee 2, this made the beginning of the 1990s into the heyday of the program; she stated that it now was popular and attracted ambitious students (cf. Skolverket, 1998b). This period also included the new extended Child and Leisure program, which started in 1992.

In 1994, the new program, which was initiated as part of the upper-secondary school reform, was moved from the context of education for different care vocations to the general upper-secondary school together with non-vocational theoretical programs. The program hereby not only lost its position as the first educational step in becoming a preschool teacher. It didn't any longer offer the students a distinct vocational exam. Int.3 discusses this change as follows:

No, they did not receive a vocational degree. You become a childminder when you are employed as one. We had to spend lots of time to talk about this. First in order to understand it ourselves and then to be able to convey it to the students, and give them that strength. It became a generational concern for all mothers and fathers who wanted their children to become childminders... 'don't they become anything?', they said. 'But o yeah, they acquire an enormous competence, but they receive their vocational designation in connection with the employment. But they have their knowledge and can work in different fields and also get further education'.

In connection with this move the status declined again (cf. Skolverket 1998). In answering the question concerning challenges when the childminder education was moved to the general upper-secondary school, the former principal (Int.3) stated:

I think it was sort of a crisis and you put your own interests in at the forefront. It was a feeling of inferiority that can emerge when you are put into a new environment, which is widely different from what you are familiar with. ... It was in 1996, I believe, when we were placed together with those education programs. We have a lot to think about—a whole lot. The students were subjected to, a bit of..., maybe not bullying, but close enough.

The care pedagogy that dominated the childminder training both as pedagogy and content, was challenged by the more theoretical and subject oriented character of the general upper secondary school. When the childminder program found itself in a context where academic knowledge and practice was constructed as the norm, the students – as well as the teachers – were constituted, by themselves and others as inferior. The move of the program from a context of vocational care education to the general, or academic, upper-secondary school encompassed an expectation that the educational character of the program would become more salient, and that the pedagogy of the Child and Leisure program would gain more recognition. Together this would enhance the status of the program. According to our informants and the evaluation from The Swedish National Agency for Education (1998) this was not the case. Instead the students at the Child and Leisure were questioned by students from the academic programs. Informant 3 states:

If the perspective from the outside is that you help or play with children. ‘What are you doing? Are you playing with kids? Dadelidaddel’ you could hear from the theoretical programs. It was a lot of that.

In relation to the theoretical programs the Child and Leisure program and the students were constructed as less serious, valuable and consequently as subordinate.

The undermining of the status and position of childminders was further enhanced by the National Curriculum for the Preschool in 1998 (Skolverket, 1998a). When emphasizing education in preschool it increased the ambiguity of the already uncertain position of childminders. When preschool teacher education two years later, in 2000, became part of the education for teachers for compulsory school, preschools were simultaneously constituted as schools rather than child daycare institutions. This was further reinforced in Government Bill 2004 (Skolverket, 2005), which explicitly stated that preschool teachers should constitute the main part of the workforce and have overall responsibility for the quality of the preschool. It is not preposterous to assume that these measures further contributed to the construction of both the childminder and childminder education as vocations and training with low value. Once again, childminder education was constructed as low-status attracting students from non-academic backgrounds and with low grades, and as a program that pointed to a life trajectory with few prospects for advancement of their situation.

The above demonstrates that the classed aspects of the childminder program are intertwined with notions and policy measures concerning the relation between care and education; gender equality ambitions; upper secondary schooling as a vocational education or as a prerequisite and foundation for further studies.

As the foregoing history of the program shows, there is no unambiguous correspondence between the education program and how it is attributed and produces status and class. Neither does it suffice to describe the status and classed aspects of the program in terms of a tension between achieving status and maintaining a unique identity (cf. Blank, 2010). In a general sense, the program has never been seen as a high-status upper-secondary program. One reason is that it has basically always been a vocational program. Vocational programs are generally attributed lower status than theoretical programs because they are intertwined with discourses of less prosperous life trajectories for students in terms of economy, agency, and power to influence their work conditions. The program, since it is preparing for care work and work with children, has been constructed as female. This positions it as a low-status vocational program in relation to vocational programs that are dominated by males or that have a more equal gender balance (Skolverket, 1998b).

This general positioning of the program as a low-status program, however, is not unequivocal. Informant 3 told how parents (mothers) encouraged their daughters to become childminders because they saw it as a suitable and honorable vocation. A salient conception from our informants is that at the beginning of the period of study and at the end of the 1980s, the program attracted high-achieving and ambitious girls. At the inception of the program, this was further reinforced by the discourse of childcare as a progressive and dynamic social sector. During these periods, the program was constituted as more akin to theoretical programs than to other vocational programs, and consequently as a high-status program among the vocational programs—as a program that could serve as a starting point for enhanced life chances and a positive class trajectory.

The above show how the construction of the childminder program has altered in terms of status. Although our informants agree to these shifts in the status that the program and their students have been attributed, they simultaneously stress the high quality of both the pedagogy and the content of the program. According to them this has been a salient trait of the childminder education from its inception and onward. Informant 2 recounts how impressed she was with both the content and the competence of the teachers when she first encountered the program. The fluctuation in status does not, they claim, reflect the quality of what the program offers. There are consequently two discourses at work, one from the inside stressing innovative care pedagogy and competences that the students gain through the training. The other from the outside, attributing differing status to childminder education due to how it is positioned in relation to other upper secondary school programs.

Discourses of sameness and difference

The status of the program was not only constituted in relation to its content and pedagogy and how it was positioned in relation to other upper secondary school programs. It was also affected by how it was made sense of in relation to preschool teachers and preschool teacher training. In this concluding section we analyze our results as articulations of discourses of sameness and

discourses of difference in relation to care and education, and to childminders and preschool teachers. The objective is to elucidate, but also complicate, how childminder education is attributed, and how it produces, status and class in the context of child work training.

The discourse of sameness between care and education, manifested in different measures to erase the difference between role, tasks, and status between childminders and preschool teachers, is reiterated in (a) the emphasis on teamwork in the childcare reform of the 1970s, (b) the common designation of the two vocations as “child pedagogues” (1968 års Barnstugeutredning, 1975), (c) the similar content of the two education programs regardless of educational level (*ibid.*), and (d) the predominance of female students both in the education program and in preschool personnel. Difference in terms of level of education, wage, and age are furthermore subverted by a discourse on sameness that is manifested by a stress on experience rather than education. Childminders and preschool teachers are expected to share the responsibility for the preschool and work as a team, and a long experience of childcare can obfuscate the difference between the two (Hector 1985, s.71). From the perspective of childminder education, the diffusion of the difference had two facets. The emphasis on education at the expense of care could result in higher status and better life chances, but on the other hand it subverted the specific character and foundation of the program and the vocation. Today, there is no specific childminder education, and most municipalities are reluctant to hire childminders.

Parallel to the discourse of sameness, we have been able to discern materializations of a discourse on difference between care and education. This is manifested in how these two types of vocational education are placed at different educational levels, with the childminder program at the lower level, situated in an educational context characterized by care. The organization of these educational programs means that childminders in most cases are younger than preschool teachers when they enter the vocation, which in turn leads to the construction of childminders as inferior to preschool teachers. The differentiation in education (and age) serves as a foundation for different wage levels, where—although both categories are low paid—childminders earn less than preschool teachers. Furthermore, the childminders are organized in a labor union that includes all forms of care workers, whereas preschool teachers are organized in a teachers’ union.

The discourse of difference is further reinforced by how the curriculum designates different roles in terms of responsibility between childminders and preschool teachers. The latter are given responsibility for work at the preschool, whereas the role of the childminders is to follow guidelines set by the curriculum (Skolverket, 1998a, Utbildningsdepartementet, 2010). This makes childminders into assistants rather than pedagogues on equal terms with preschool teachers, or rather than caregivers with a specific competence. As less competent teachers in a preschool focused on education, their position and role as child workers is no longer self-evident. Consequently, the life chances and future prospects of those who study in the program that now harbors childminder education are uncertain.

A gradual eradication of the childminder vocation?

To conclude, the gradual shift in emphasis in childminder education from care to education had two facets. In some respects, it gave the program a relatively high status and provided students with prerequisites for a working life where they could influence their daily practices on equal terms as well as play an important role in the construction of the welfare society. On the other hand, the gradual discursive eradication and depreciation of care as an aspect of preschool work subverted the rationale for the specific

vocation of childminders. If both childminders and preschool teachers were experts on education, why settle for the less competent childminders?

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Archive data

- Data from the archive of the County of Östergötland, the Thapperska School archive (TSA)
- Vol. A3a, Klass- och elevrådsprotokoll (minutes from class-councils and student social welfare councils).
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