



UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG

Strengthening Early Childhood Education Systems:
Investing Early to Ensure Effective Learning

Preschool quality and conditions for children's early learning: A Swedish perspective

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From a perspective on preschool quality this paper aims to discuss conditions created in preschool for children's lifelong learning

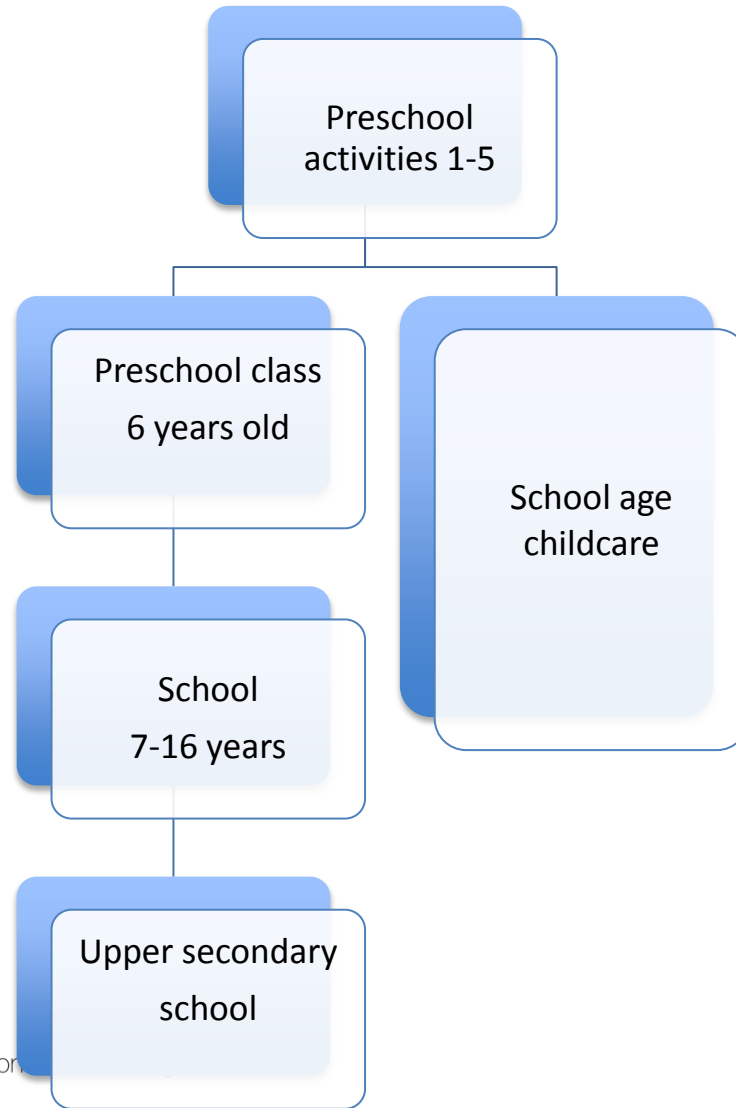
- ❑ Policy and methods for evaluation and assessment on:
 - the societal level/arena
 - the municipality level/arena
 - the preschool level/arena

- ❑ Structural aspects in preschool
- ❑ preschool teachers competence and approach





The Swedish educational system





Swedish preschool

- An important aspect of the welfare system, a school-form of its own, the first step in the educational system - Ministry of Education
- The educational system, is decentralised and governed by goals instead of regulations
- Full cover, stable government financing, low fees for parents, high staff/child ratio and well-educated staff
- High pedagogical and political intentions:
 - A new preschool teacher education in 2011, 3 and 1/2 year – a bachelor degree in the six term, the last term on advanced level with possibilities to continue on the master program
 - Revision of curriculum, came into force 2011
 - A New Education Act, came into force 2011





The Swedish preschool context

- Preschools in 2012 = 9991 (M = 7267 & P = 2 724)
- 1-5 years old - for parents who are working, studying, on parental leave or unemployed and for children themselves
- 84% of all one to five year olds are in preschool(2012/2013)
- Parents/children are entitled to a place in preschool within three or four months
- 3, 4 and 5 year-olds are entitled, free of charge, to at least 525 hours of preschool yearly
- A maximum fee
- Opening hours 06.30 – 18.00





Quality – the arena of society, municipality and preschool

- **Society:**

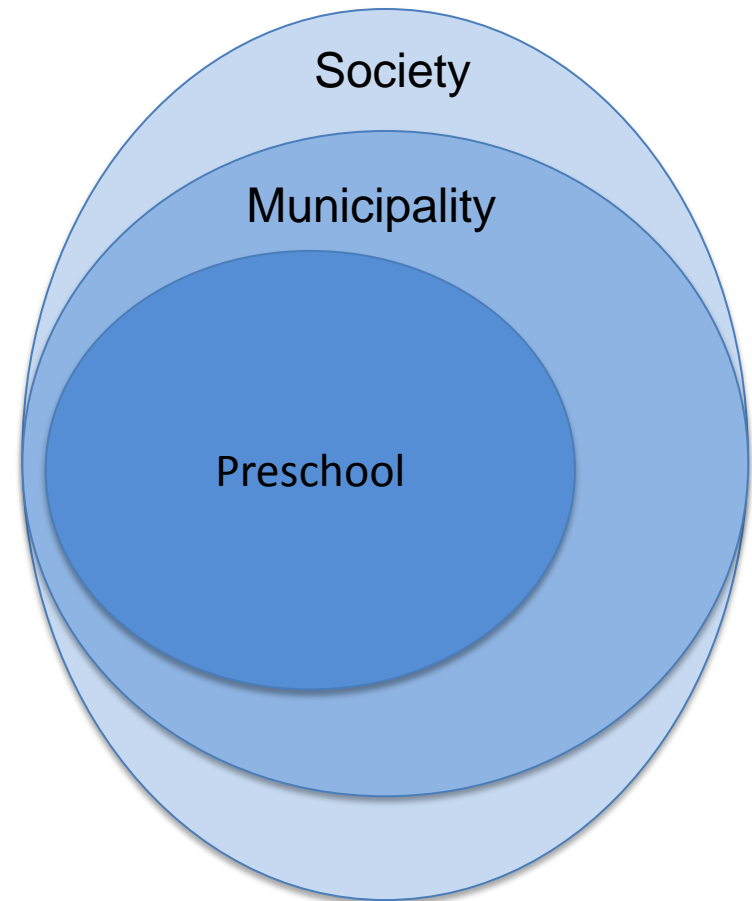
- The National Agency for Education and the National Agency for School-inspection are responsible on a national level
- Policy, curriculum guidelines for evaluation & Documentation
- No methods recommended

- **Municipality:**

- Municipalities are responsible on a local level
- Multiple methods - ECERS

- **Preschool:**

- Evaluate the preschool quality
- Follow up, document & analyze children's learning processes
- Multiple methods – ECERS – pedagogical documentation





A revision of the preschool curriculum

- ❑ Raising the ambition of preschool with a strengthened pedagogical task
- ❑ The goals and content related to literacy, mathematics, science and technology are strengthened
- ❑ A new area are introduced – documentation and evaluation
- ❑ Preschool teachers – responsible for pedagogical issues
- ❑ Responsibility of the preschool head

- ❑ National preschool curriculum with clear and integrated content goals for learning, play & care



The preschool curriculum

- ❑ The quality of the preschool shall be regularly and systematically documented, followed up, evaluated and developed.
- ❑ Evaluating the quality of the preschool and creating good conditions for learning requires that the child's learning and development be monitored, documented and analysed.
- ❑ The aim of evaluation is to obtain knowledge of how the quality of the preschool i.e. its organisation, content and actions can be developed so that each child receives the best possible conditions for learning and development.



The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS)

Thelma Harms & Richard Clifford in 1980, ECERS

Thelma Harms & Richard Clifford & Debby Cryer in 1998, ECERS-r

Kathy Sylva, Iram Siraj-Blatchford & Brenda Taggart in 2004, ECERS-e

- 37/43 items which define different levels of quality in typical situations of ECE
- Seven subscales
- Item scores ranging from 1 (inadequate) through to 7 (excellent).
- The lower levels of quality are characterized by pedagogical unawareness and a focus on rules, and material resources,
- Excellent level is characterized by teachers' interaction with children and the best possible use of all resources, including themselves, to promote children's learning, participation, and influence.



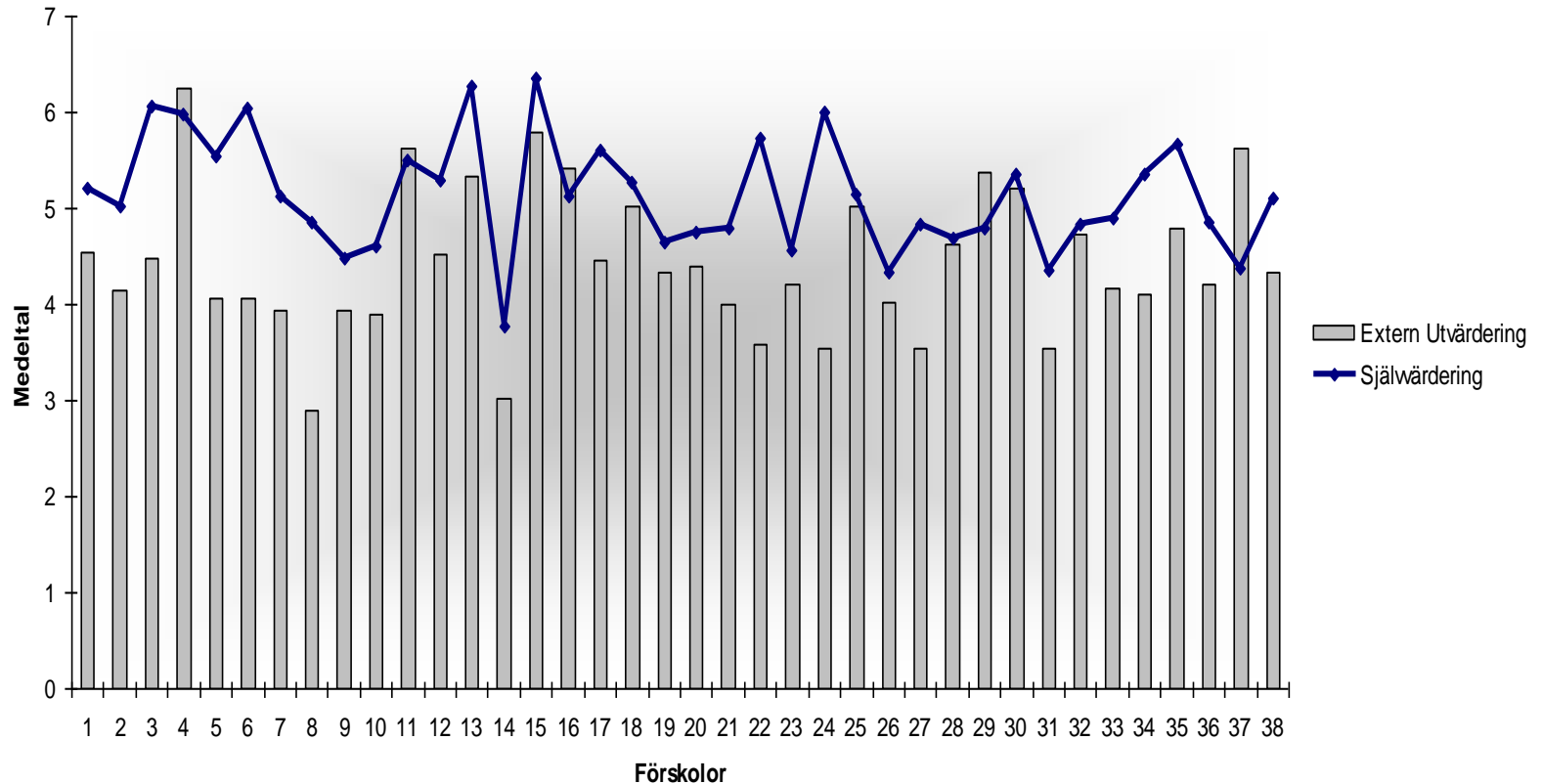
Why ECFERS?

- ❑ Its design to detect curricular & environmental quality
- ❑ Its comparative function of preschool quality from a national as well as international perspective
- ❑ Its focus on a child perspective – child's experience
- ❑ Focus of evaluation is on preschool as a learning environment – not on individual teachers and children
- ❑ External and self-evaluations can be combined and compared
- ❑ Highlights teachers approaches and competence
- ❑ A starting point for a competence development program

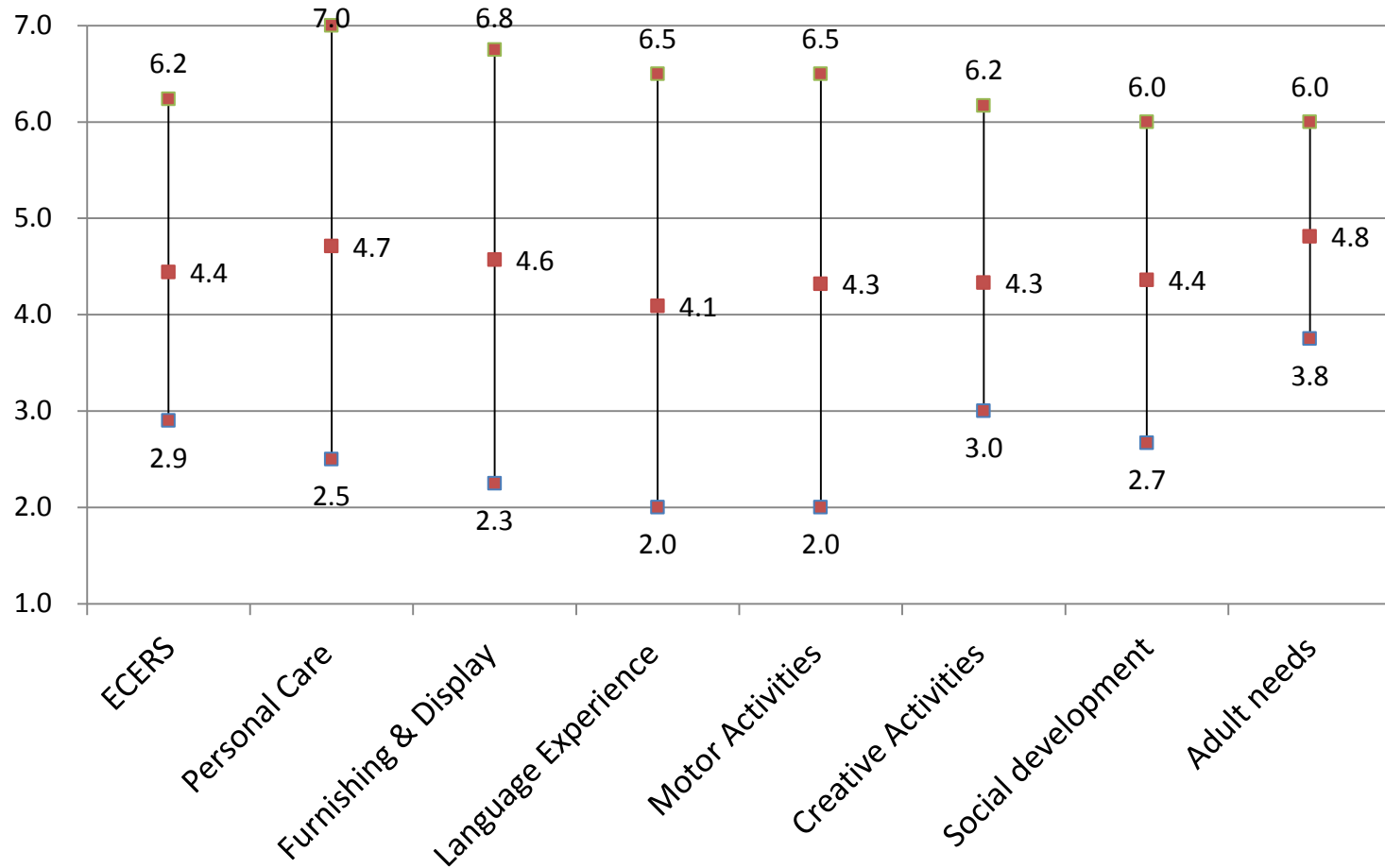


Variation in preschool quality

Extern Utvärdering Kontra Självvärdering



ECERS and subscale means





CHALLENGING LEARNING ORIENTED ENVIRONMENTS

- *A learning oriented approach*
- *To know and to do*



CHILD-CENTRED NEGOTIATING ENVIRONMENTS

- *A negotiating approach*
- *To do*

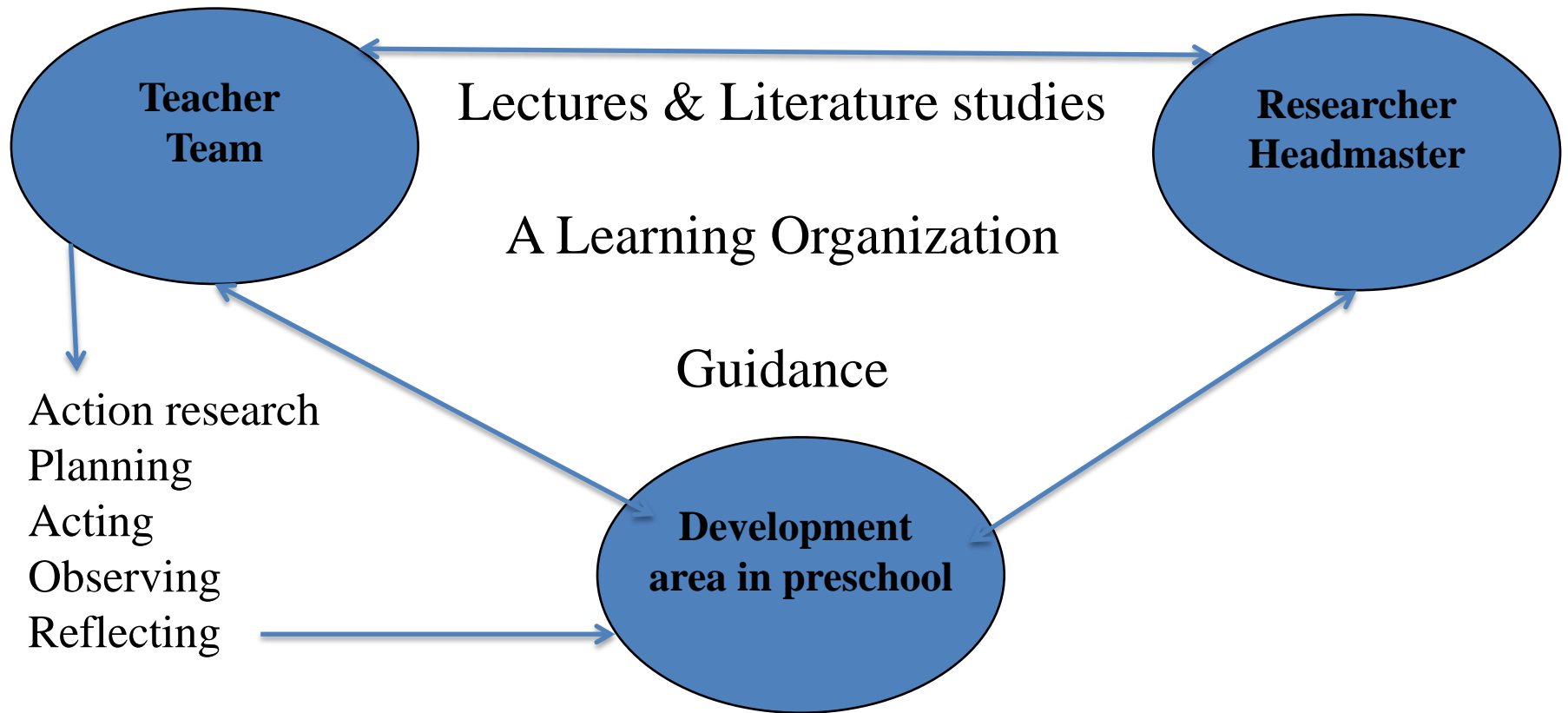


SEPARATING AND LIMITING ENVIRONMENTS

- *An abdicated or dominating approach*
- *To do*



A model for competence development in preschool





Results of the competence development program

- ❑ 20 preschools, the same financial conditions and staff-child ratio
- ❑ The intervention group (9 preschools) enhanced the quality from an average of 4.50 to 4.98. The control group had a lower quality in the second evaluation, from an average of 4.49 to 4.18.
- ❑ The differences between the two groups can be explained by the massive and directed development input, which throughout the development work continuously changed and evolved through the influence of the teachers themselves:
 - The structure of the Model of Competence Development and a focus on teachers competence
 - The researcher and the co-worker at the university were involved in the development process
 - The whole working team participated
 - Competence development program lasted over one year



Conclusion

- **ECERS defined three different learning environments**
 - children's unequal opportunities for learning.
- **A link between high quality and children's learning**
 - children solved more advanced tasks in language and mathematics in preschools of high quality, at 2 years of age.
- **Children's learning as contextual and relational – conditions for learning depends on the quality of preschool**
 - children's learning and development needs to be viewed in relation to conditions created for their learning in preschool.

- **Preschool teachers competence as fundamental for conditions created for children's learning within different contents in preschool.**
- **Preschool teacher competence as differences in:**
 - focus, communication, interaction, pedagogical awareness, intentions and content knowledge.
- **From a culture of doing to a culture of pedagogical intentions:**
 - Knowledge of how to direct children's learning towards a specific learning object and how to communicate this object in a meta- cognitive, mutual and sustainable manner.

□ Society

- Curriculum goals to aim at that are linked to one another throughout the educational system – mirroring the same view on knowledge, learning and the child/student
- Stable government financing and good resources to preschool
- Preschool teacher education – academic level
- Policy to evaluate the quality of the learning environment/preschool

□ Municipality

- Those who are responsible for preschools and school on a local level needs to work in line with intentions on the national level and the preschool level.

□ Preschool

- Shared and mutual knowledge of content and activities as a base for transition and information between preschool and school
- Follow up, document & analyze children's learning processes, and be presented on a group level as information to stakeholders
- Careful with information on individual children's learning processes



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