Learning the Fundamental Democratic Values In Preschool

A Case Study of the Implementation of the National Educational Policy in Sweden

Ryoko Sato-Linder

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Institute of International Education,
Department of Education
Abstract

Under the 1990s restructuring of the Swedish education system, ‘the fundamental democratic values’ have been stipulated both in the Education Act and all of the national curricula as one of the educational goals. This study aims to illuminate how the fundamental democratic values are implemented in the Swedish preschool curriculum, its process and outcome on a micro level, a preschool. The role of the preschools in Sweden has changed, especially after the new curriculum was issued in 1998. There is now an expectation, “to impart and establish respect for human rights and the fundamental democratic values” in preschool instruction and to “actively promote” these values in its work with children. Through a qualitative case study focused on a preschool in Forest municipality, Stockholm, the findings show the principal and the pedagogue in the chosen preschool are conscious of the importance of the fundamental democratic values within the individual perspectives. This study also illustrates that the pedagogues have continuously developed their understandings for the fundamental values through the several types of meetings, and have applied it to their daily activities. Furthermore, the findings also show that the pedagogue in the chosen preschool have utilised ‘the five value keywords’ which were created in the school district where the preschool resides. As a whole the research on the chosen preschool indicates the importance of role of pedagogue at preschool for implementation of the national education policy. On the other hand, this study has clarified that Forest municipality has had an important role in the implementation process and evaluation of preschools in the municipality. This fact indicates that the way in which municipalities take initiatives affects successful implementation of the curriculum. As a concluding remark, this study argues the results of the research indicate that the chosen preschool has supplied opportunities for both children and parents to learn/exercise deliberative democracy, that may be seeds to foster active citizen.
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List of Abbreviations

BRUK          Bedömning    Reflektion    Utvärdering    Kvalitet
              [Assessment    Reflection    Evaluation    Quality]
MoER          The Ministry of Education and Research
OECD          Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SALAR         The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions
Skolverket    The Swedish National Agency for Education
Skolinspektionen    The National Schools Inspectorate
SIRIS         The National Agency for Education's online information system on results and quality
UQDR          An administrative unit for Quality, Development and Research within the Education Committee of Lidingö municipality

About Translations

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Chapter One
Introduction

1.1 Background of Study

The purpose of this study is to illuminate how the fundamental democratic values in the Swedish curriculum for preschool are implemented, its process and outcome. What and how do they do to keep democracy going? Does Sweden try to develop the next generation to be active participant in society? These questions have been the starting point of this study. One of the key points to find answers to these questions seems to be concealed in how education/learning is conducted at preschools and schools. The reason for holding such an assumption is primarily based on the stipulation in the Education Act of Sweden (2010:800), Chapter 1, Article 4:

4 § Education in the school system aims at that children and pupils should acquire and develop knowledge and values. It should promote the development and learning of all children and pupils, and a lifelong desire to learn. Education should also impart and establish respect for human rights and the fundamental democratic values on which Swedish society is based. […].

As mentioned above, the Education Act of Sweden stipulates clearly that children and pupils in Sweden should acquire and develop knowledge and ‘values’. Moreover, education in Sweden should transmit ‘the fundamental democratic values’ as well as respect for human rights. In line with this article of the Education Act, the curricula for preschools and schools in Sweden develop this article and stipulate the fundamental democratic values as one of the goals of education in a more concrete way. Moreover, “increased democracy” has been one of the three main goals, with two other goals i.e. “greater efficiency” and “enhanced professionalism”, in the educational restructuring in
Sweden since the 1980s (Forsberg, Lundgren, in Rotberg, 2010). These policies imply that the Swedish government deems the preschools and schools as one of the places for implementing democratic values and also that the government has strong intentions to implement such values.

1.2 Aim and Objectives

The purpose of this study is to investigate the processes and outcomes of implementing a goal of education policy – stipulated fundamental values – on a mezzo level, a municipality and a micro level, a preschool. The specific objectives are to:

1. Provide the overview of the discourses both of ‘fundamental values in education’ and ‘values education’ in Sweden that may influence both national and municipal and preschool policy and strategy.

2. Investigate the processes and outcomes of implementing the goals of the fundamental values at a preschool, both in relation with municipality and in individual preschool, how they understand the national policy of fundamental democratic values and apply to their daily activities.

1.3 Limitations of Study

There are limitations inherent in the chosen methodology. Qualitative character and case study design of the present study imply that the findings cannot be representative of all the cases, and thus, cannot be generalised to other settings. The critique that qualitative studies are often too much subjective, this is also the case in this study. In the present research of implementation conducted, the researcher focused on relation between municipality and preschool, and relations between pedagogues and pedagogues, pedagogues and children, and pedagogues and parents, while another researcher may likely take up other perspectives. The difficulty of replicating a qualitative study is also a limitation of this research.
There are some practical limitations to the research that may impact the results and outcomes. Firstly, the research on the present study was conducted in only one preschool, which can lead to a relatively narrow view of perceptions at the micro level. It was modified to some extent; however, by choosing the preschool which the researcher’s child attends. The choice gave the researcher opportunities to do ad-hoc and participant observation, and also gathering materials over longer period, even before conducting the research. Secondly, interviews of the responsible persons at the municipal level were not carried out. This limitation could not be modified as the person did not reply to the researcher’s mail and telephone contact. As a result, only the method of document analysis was applied for analysis of the policy implementation of the municipality. Fortunately, the registrar at the municipality whom the researcher contacted was available to answer questions, and quickly responded in order to provide documents. Through his cooperation, not only were the important documents made available, but other important information was utilised to gain the municipality’s perspective of the policy implementation. Finally, the choice of utilizing Swedish as the research language, may affect results as the researcher has Swedish as a secondary language.

1.4 Significance of Study

As Hägglund states, “[r]elations between articulations in the text of the curriculum and concrete ordinary activities of preschool is multi-dimensional, inconstant and full of complex challenges and conditions” (in Johansson & Thornberg, 2014, p. 102), it is challenging to shed light on the implementation process and outcome at preschool level. Nonetheless, this study aims to contribute to the field. The present study is on the implementation of national education policy, specifically, of values to a preschool. The Swedish government intends to establish respect for human rights and the fundamental democratic values within children and pupils, i.e. future participants in the democratic process. When a government has an educational policy on values, how does a preschool, which has a certain level of autonomy and is considered to be ‘street-level-bureaucrats’ think and take actions? This study will provide a close up on its reality and its mechanisms, and will give insight in to the field.
In so far as the researcher studied, there were not so many studies of the implementation of the curriculum in the Swedish preschool, and it was difficult to find any study that focused on the relation between a municipality and a preschool in the municipality in detail. The hope is that this study will therefore contribute to the field some significant way.

As Bryman states “the findings of qualitative research are to generalize to theory rather than populations” (2012, p. 406). That is also the case for this study. This study utilises the theoretical approach of Lindensjö and Lundgren (2000), seeing as, they stress that the ‘street-level-bureaucrats’ at the micro level, i.e. pedagogue at a preschool in the present research, take a strong initiative in the implementation (p. 177). The research results and its analysis of the micro level in the present study may illuminate the reality in the inductive way of generalizing the theoretical approach.

1.5 Previous Studies in the Field

There are many studies and reports about the fundamental values in the Swedish curriculum for preschool, both by academic researchers and by the Swedish National Agency for Education (hereafter: Skolverket), but it seems that there are not many studies of implementation that specifically focus on the relationship between municipalities and preschools. Among the studies, “Implementing a National Curriculum in Swedish Preschools” by Ingrid Engdahl (2004) provides a comprehensive view of the implementation. She takes up the four perspectives on the implementation of the curriculum for preschools and shows some examples of practices in some preschools that are in line with the perspectives; those examples show only the positive results of implementing the new curriculum. Among the four perspectives, in-service training and discussions is also the case for the research results in the present study and the writer takes up these perspectives again in Chapter 6.

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2 The four perspectives are namely: In-service training and discussions have been raised in most municipalities and preschools; The concept of the child has changed in the new preschool curriculum; The concept of taking the perspective of the child is noted in the preschool curriculum; The concepts of knowledge and learning have been broadened in the curriculum. These perspectives are discussed in the section 2.5.1.
A book with the title *Values Education: Ethics and Democracy in Preschool and School* (Johansson & Thornberg, 2014), is an anthology that includes fifteen articles that are conscious of the stipulated fundamental values. The articles are written by researchers from the field of the study of pedagogy, which highlight different issues, e.g. democracy and participation, conflict solution between children and pupils, religious education, bullying, etc., gathered in the concept of ‘values education’.³

There is no article that deals with the implementation of the stipulated fundamental values directly, but one article questions to what extent the stipulated fundamental values play a role in ordinary preschool activities. Annica Löfdahl (in Johansson & Thornberg, 2014) argues that children construct their own rules for belonging in the children-group, and that they reproduce the content of the didactic agenda in their own way to make it fit with their own present situation. She further argues that it is difficult to anticipate how children will interpret the agenda, and that it is important for researchers and teachers to understand and identify the elements that determine the children’s own interpretation of notions of, for example, equality (ibid.). Thornberg (2004, 2006) also states his view that the formulated goals and directives for values education in schools, e.g. stipulated fundamental values, occur not only as stated practices, e.g. värdegrundsarbete (pedagogic work on the fundamental values), but also as unstated practices of values education. He stresses that “[t]he actual activities at a school is affected by or dependent on a variety of factors and conditions” and “an unspoken practice” of values education therefore occurs in schools (Thornberg, 2004, pp. 29-30)⁴ These perspectives are beyond the scope of the present study, but it seems to be inevitable that these viewpoints are trying to gain a holistic view of the implementation of the stipulated fundamental values.

One can also read the studies and reports of implementation of the stipulated fundamental values in preschool within the publication by Skolverket. Firstly, the second national evaluation of preschool was published in 2008, ten years after introduction of the new curriculum, and shows the result of implementation of the goal of ‘Norm and value’ (Skolverket, 2008). The report states that both the municipal survey and the case studies that the report used as reference show that the impact of the curriculum has been

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³ The concept of ‘values education’ is discussed in the section 3.2.
⁴ His comment is about the activities at ‘schools’, but ‘unspoken practice’ seems also the case for preschools.
strongest within the goals and/or guidelines for the area of ‘Norms and values’, i.e. the fundamental values. About the reason for the strong impact, the report presents the following analysis:

One explanation for the strong impact for the objective area, Norms and values, can be that it connects to a strong tradition in the Swedish pre-school and builds on the principle that development occurs in groups and that children develop through interaction with others. Many pre-schools worked with developing a child’s ability to take into consideration and think about how other people think and feel even before the curriculum. The result indicates that the work within this area has been further developed and is more in-depth. (ibid.)

The analysis above shows that Skolverket has a perception that the stipulated fundamental values had already been, as a principle in Swedish preschools, ‘a strong tradition’ before the formal introduction of the curriculum. This argument is further discussed in the Chapter Six, relating to the results of the present research.

Another report, entitled To challenge and stimulate learning and development of children in preschool (Skolverket, 2014) is a study of how pedagogues in preschools work to create desire and motivation, and preconditions for children’s learning within the fields of knowledge, and the results of the project “Non-Cognitive Competencies” of Skolverket. The contents of non-cognitive competencies are namely: creativity, self-perception, responsibility and execution, thinking and analysis, communication and social relations and empathy. In these elements, one can see some of the contents of the fundamental values. This shows, therefore, that the fundamental values can be re-captured as Non-cognitive competencies and that they have already tried to implement them in preschools.

5 The pre-school curriculum states goals and/or guidelines for the areas, Norms and values, Development and learning, Children’s influence, Pre-school and the home as well as Cooperation with pre-school class, school and leisure time center.

6 The term in Swedish: kreativitet, självuppfattning, ansvar och genomförande, tänkande och analys, kommunikation och sociala relationer samt empati.
1.6 Country Context – The Position of Preschool in the Swedish School System

Children in Sweden can attend preschool anytime between the ages of one and five (Skolverket, n.d. 2). According to Skolverket, 83 per cent of all children aged one to five are enrolled in the preschool system. In the 3–5 age group, almost all children, 95 per cent, were enrolled. This means that over 480 000 children were attending pre-school, which had around 100 000 members of pedagogues (Skolverket, n.d. 3).

Preschools in Sweden have not been like nursery schools; they have upheld an educational function in same system as other schools since the former Education Act came into effect in 1986. (UNESCO, 2012). After the Education Act was issued, many amendments that aimed to increase integration between school, preschool and childcare, provisions concerning preschool activity and childcare were reformulated. In addition, the pedagogical role of preschools was clarified and a curriculum was introduced in August 1998 (ibid).

The preschool system is intended for children of one year of age up until an age where they can start in preschool class or compulsory school. The purpose of preschool is to stimulate children's development and learning in a safe and caring environment (Skolverket, n.d.1). Preschool takes a holistic view of children and their needs and is designed so that “care, fosterage and learning create a whole” (Skolverket, 1998, 2010). Preschool is intended to promote a broad spectrum of contacts and social community, and prepares children for continued education and lifelong learning (Skolverket, n.d.1, n.d. 4). “Consequently, the curriculum is based on the model that has internationally gotten the designation, ‘educare’ and which involves care and pedagogy being united in pre-school activities.” (Skolverket, 2008). The preschool curriculum was revised in 2010 and now contains clearer objectives for children's development in language and mathematics, and in natural sciences and technology. The guidelines for pedagogue responsibilities have been clarified, both at an individual teacher level and at a team level. New sections on

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7 Information on the web page “Who attends preschool?”
8 Information on the web page “Allt fler barn i förskolan”
9 According to the report, “the model of “educare” has been praised in OECD connections and the Swedish pre-school have, in several regards, been promoted as a role model”.

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monitoring, evaluation and development, and the responsibilities of pre-school principal, have been added. (Skolverket, 2010)

1.7 Organization of Study

In this study, implementation of the fundamental democratic values (hereafter: the fundamental values) in a Swedish preschool is central issues. The fundamental values relate to the concept of democracy, but the main focus of this paper is on the implementation process and its outcome. Therefore, the contents or definitions of the values and democracy itself are not examined in this paper. Rather, this paper focuses on the implementation of the national policy on municipality and preschool level. Chapter One, introduces the writer’s interest in the present study, and then aim, objectives for this study are described respectively. The limitation, the significance and the country context of this study are also included in this chapter. In Chapter Two, as the relevant concepts, the fundamental values and Values Education are discussed. In the same chapter, the theoretical approach by Lindensjö and Lundgren is presented. This theoretical approach deals with policy making and implementation of educational reform in Sweden, and it also shows ‘a Swedish model’. The writer has not found any theory that would be more appropriate for the present study, and therefore this theoretical approach was used as the main theoretical framework for the analysis. The research design and the methods, as well as ethical considerations for this study are discussed in the following Chapter Three. For analysing the implementation process and its outcome in a preschool, the case study design and a method of unstructured and semi-structured interviews were adopted. Chapter Four shows the results of the research at the chosen preschool and the municipality. The results of research are further discussed in Chapter Five, basically in line with the relevant concepts and the theoretical frameworks of implementation that were chosen. Finally, in Chapter Six, some concluding remarks of this study and suggestions for future research are presented.
Chapter Two
Relevant Concepts and Theoretical Approach

In this chapter I take up firstly the ‘fundamental values’ in education and ‘values education’ as a relevant concept for the present study. The theoretical approaches are also discussed in the following section.

2.1 Fundamental Values

In this section the discourses of the stipulated fundamental values are discussed. I will take up and discuss here two reports by Skolverket which I found to relate specifically to this study. Firstly, the report “A deepened study about the fundamental values” (Skolverket, 2000) is important for understanding of what character of democracy the Swedish curricula has. In the report, the concept of deliberative democracy is described as the starting point of the report, and also says that the Swedish “national curricula have clearly contained elements” of the concept (p. 9). It is not very easy to understand the text, for example it is said “[s]chool is perceived as a collective civic right based on deliberative ground” (ibid. p. 9). What they mean by “deliberative ground” it is not entirely clear, but the writer supposes that what they intend to say is that the right should be based on mutual dialogue/discussions conducted in a rational way in order to reach a new mutual understanding and, hopefully, agreement. This point of view indicates, in other words, that preschools and schools could function as meeting places for learning deliberative democracy.

In the book, titled Fundamental values of preschools and schools (Skolverket, 2013), whose target group is people who work at preschools and schools, it describes

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10 The concept of fundamental value (värdegrund) is used not only in the field of education but also in the field of collective organizations and institutions when discussing of common ethical values. But here in this sub-chapter, discussion is limited only on the fundamental values in education.

11 In this study the concept of ‘deliberative democracy’ itself are not discussed deeply.
deliberative democracy as the central philosophical concept when they work of stipulated fundamental values.

A deliberative democratic outlook has been highlighted as productive in order to fulfil the democratic task allotted to preschools and schools. It is a democratic outlook centred on communicative ability in the form of deliberative dialogues. Such dialogues have their starting point in something that is perceived as problematic, and this kind of talks can be seen as the bedrock of democracy. In preschools and schools, problematic situations may constitute learning opportunities for all parties concerned – children, pupils, and those who work in preschools and schools. (Skolverket, 2013, P. 12)

From the contents of the report and the book, it is obvious that deliberative democracy is the philosophical foundation of the Swedish curricula, and one can assume that the policy of the fundamental values in Sweden has this perspective. In this report, the practices of preschools and schools based on deliberative democracy are analysed, concretely, with the points of views of conversation/dialogue and relation.

Thornberg (2006) discusses that the concept of the fundamental values in the curricula is controversial in some respects, with reference to several researchers. Firstly, he takes up the aspect of Boström (2000, in Thornberg, 2006) who says that the statement in the curricula “the fundamental democratic values on which Swedish society is based” is a normative statement rather than a description of factual conditions. These fundamental values constituted as inalienable, but is contradictory in itself; the curriculum says that the fundamental values are fixed, complete, indisputable, but the concept of the fundamental values can be filled with different contents.

In her article “Democracy and Influence in Preschool”, the author Anette Emilson provides the viewpoints of what democracy could mean in relationship to younger children in an institutionalised context (2014). The author points out that the importance of democratic work in the preschool is stressed in the public debate, in policy documents, as well as in research. However, researchers question whether it is at all reasonable to talk about democracy in preschools. The criticism that the concept of democracy is used in preschools mean, the author argues that there is a risk that the concept may lose its meaning and will be reduced if it becomes a matter of children’s choices. After the

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discussion of the concepts of democracy and re-examination of her own and other previous studies, the author concludes that democracy in preschool could be viable, if its relational character is underlined: “the relational character where adults show respect and empathy to the children, and listen to what they have to say” (p. 129).

2.2 Values Education

The fundamental democratic values in the Swedish National Curricula have been discussed within the field of the study of values education. Therefore the concept of values education is elaborated upon for the present study. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to penetrate into the concept in great detail, because the focus of this study is implementation, but a discussion of the emergence of this concept and its definition is important to include here as the relevant concept of fundamental values.

As Monica Taylor, British pedagogical philosopher states, “[t]he term ‘values education’ was not in common use, nor was it clearly defined” in many countries in Europe (1994, p.10), in Sweden, there was also not the common use of the term. According to the survey, which includes 26 countries in Europe, the emphases in values education in Sweden was categorised as ‘Democratic’ perspective, while the other countries have emphases on e.g. ‘Moral’ ‘Religious’ ‘Cultural aesthetic’ ‘Civic’ etc. (ibid.). However, Taylor puts it that “[v]alues education seems to cover a large, loose, diverse and controversial domain, subject to competing interests, pressures and goals” and it is difficult to find obvious grouping of European countries (p. 13). In the case of Sweden, it is described that the characteristics of values education are as follows: primarily associated with democratic values, which lie close to both human rights and to Christian values; the Curriculum Guidelines produced in 1992 stress the teaching of values in their overriding aims; and the right-wing Government is also trying to strengthen values like discipline and hard work. (pp. 195-196).

To my knowledge, the concept of values education was introduced in Sweden by Gunnel Colnerud and Robert Thornberg, who published a book on this topic through Skolverket in 2003, titled Values Education in an International Perspective. In the book, they constructed and launched the Swedish concept of values education, based on the
term of values education. With this term they refer to two fields – possibly overlapping – as they are defined in the following way:

(1) **Educational interventions, methods, activities or approaches** that are meant to stimulate, support, or influence individuals or groups to construct, incorporate, understand, shape, follow, problematize, or critically reflect on values and norms.

(2) **Activities, interactions, situations, relationships, or processes** that include some form of learning in relationship to values and norms through the construction, interpretation, reconstruction, incorporation, shaping, mediation, problematizing, questioning, or critical reflection on values and norms by individuals or groups, in the presence or absence of (1).

(Colnerud and Thornberg, 2003, p. 18)

The authors state that the concept of values education in Sweden therefore can be applied to (1) teaching methods and educational programs, as well as to (2) all kinds of activities that they mention in their definition above, which have the purpose to “mediate, shape, or problematize values and norms” and also to “stimulate or influence the moral or ethic learning of the learners”. They also state that the concept of values education can be used as a general concept, similar to ‘education’ in its broadest sense, to refer not only to methods for education but also to include “the intended and unintended, conscious and unconscious activities and processes and the learning that is relevant for this” (ibid.).

Since the publication, Thornberg has developed further the concept of values education, as “the aspect of the educational practice which results in moral or political values and norms, dispositions and skills based on such values is mediated or develop in children and young people” (Thornberg, 2004, 2006; Johansson & Thornberg, 2014).

In the book, the authors state the reason of they launched the Swedish concept of values education because there were no suitable terms within the discourse of education in Sweden at that time (pp. 17-18). One can see, from this statement, that the concept of ‘values education’ in Sweden has quite a short history. However, the concept has seemed to be established firmly since their definition. As Taylor states, “[a] definition (of values education) may be important for practical or political reasons […]” (1994, p.13), one can assume that there might be such reasons for establishing the Swedish concept of values education, since the new national curricula issued in 1990s.

Furthermore, in the book *Values Education: Ethics and Democracy in Preschool and School* (2014), the editors Johansson and Thornberg use the concept of values education “as a sort of umbrella term that itself includes other names of moral influence in
preschool and school as character education, moral education, democratic education and citizenship education” (p. 10). As another point of the concept, the authors state that “as a concept, values education is not tied to any particular ethical theory or vision of how moral influence is to take place”. Furthermore, the authors cite Taylor (1994) saying, that “Values Education is a complex concept, which embraces a number issues of which some are over-lapping” (pp. 10-11).

In my understanding and to my knowledge, the definitions suggested by Thornberg and Colnerud have never been challenged by other theorists, and their notions have been embraced by the authorities and included in official documents, such as curricula.

Thornberg stresses that the formulated goals and directives for values education in schools occur not only as a stated practices, e.g. school subjects, but also as unstated practices of values education (2004, 2006). Based on this discussion of stipulated and non-stipulated practices, he defines explicit values education and implicit values education in the following way: “While explicit values education refers to schools’ official curriculum of values education, implicit values education is associated with hidden curriculum and implicit values, embedded in school and classroom practices” (2006, p. 252).

In Sweden, as the writer explained above, the concept of values education was established only recently, and occurred simultaneously with the emergence of the fundamental values in the national curricula. Stipulated fundamental values seem to be an inevitable topic for researchers of values education and also of democratic education, moral education, character education and citizenship education to study and interpret.

In the book edited by Johansson and Thornberg (2014), which was introduced on the previous page, for example, one can see many different aspects when one studies around the stipulated fundamental values in preschool, in connection with values education. To give some examples from the book, the author Johansson & Thornberg take up the topic of relation between ‘knowledge’ and ‘values’. The curriculum for preschool stipulates increasing children’s knowledge as the one of the goals. The authors stress that, “the works at preschool to increase knowledge of children about the surrounding world […]

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13 There is a school subject ‘pedagogic work on fundamental values’ on the high school level.

14 In line with this definition, Thornberg choses the topic of school rules as his research object for his doctoral thesis, and investigates everyday values education in schools as a field study (Thornberg, 2006).
means [...] that values are also mediated. Knowledge is by no means value free or value neutral”. (p. 11) By this they mean that, supposedly, when one gains knowledge, one comes also to understand the value around the knowledge. In this meaning, one can say that ‘values’ in Swedish curriculum for preschool is not an abstract or philosophical goal, but a more realistic and practical one.

With the purpose of inviting to a dialogue about how fundamental values can be kept alive in the daily activities, the author Bodil Halvars-Franzén supports her arguments with a study of two preschool classes. In her article “Holding Values Alive”, she highlights how the fundamental value work can take different forms. The author describes two parallel processes in which the values were kept alive in both of the preschool classes: one that is based on wordly communication and one that is more physical. She argues that values can be expressed and tested “by offering both time and space for – on the one hand – talks, discussions and meetings, and – on the other hand – wrestling, dance, or just fooling around” (p. 181). The author quotes Dolk (2013, in Johansson & Thornberg) saying that “if you leave the doors open for the unforeseen in order for it to be actualized – both in momentary meetings and longer processes – than you also open up for differences to appear” (p. 182).

In her article, “Values Education: About the Importance of a Distinguishing Language”, Gunnel Colnerud sheds light on the importance that school professionals should have a language for issues that relate to values education. She introduces the description of concepts used as a hierarchy of normative concepts – Value, Norm, Virtue, Principle and Rule – and interprets the contents of the fundamental values in the curriculum for compulsory school. According to her argument, such a language is necessary for the teacher in his or her work, in order to distinguish what values may be at stake in any given situation. Colnerud says that “it will be difficult to conduct the assignment of values education if the teacher does not distinguish between different norms and assumptions about how ethics develop, or different principles of fairness”. As she mentions in her article, the curriculum for preschool has a less detailed description of the fundamental values than compulsory school. Her argument, however, seems to provide equally useful considerations for preschool professionals. The perspective of this article seems to be important and one can say that this article indicates the importance of professionalism of pedagogue in preschool.
2.3 Theoretical Approach of Policy Implementation in Education

2.3.1 The Swedish Model of Policymaking and Implementation in Education

According to Lindensjö and Lundgren’s theoretical model of policymaking and implementation of education (see Lindensjö and Lundgren, 2000), the Swedish model consists of three different arenas, namely: the *Policymaking Arena*, the *Transforming and Mediation Arena*, and the *Implementation Arena*. In this paper, I limit the theoretical framework to include two of these three different arenas, namely the Policymaking arena and the Implementation arena (Figure 1), in accordance with the theoretical model. The actors in the Policymaking arena and the Implementation Arena can be indicated as in Figure 2 below.

![Figure 1: Policymaking Arena and Implementation Arena](image-url)
The concept of “Policymaking Arena” refers to the policymaking institution, where overall goals and reforms that are deemed to be the expression of the desire of society are created (Lindensjö and Lundgren, 2000). The other arena – “Implementation Arena” – can be defined as an institution that exercises policy implementation, and “policy implementation in Sweden is primarily an administrative task, which is performed within national agencies with a certain amount of autonomy from political influence” (Forsberg and Lundgren, in Rotberg., 2010, p. 198). Lindensjö and Lundgren (2000) also talk about the implementation as processes by which official plans and policies are realized, and they also divide these processes as (a) the formulation of guidelines (Guideline-writing), and (b) the actual “field-implementation” (p. 176). The former are put into words by bureaucrats at the national level, i.e. Skolverket, but may also be done within municipalities. The latter – the actual execution of reforms – is said to be conducted by the teachers.
In their book, Lindensjö & Lundgren (2000) refer to teachers as “street-level bureaucrats”, and argue for the importance of looking specifically at the role of teachers and other actors at the micro level in the implementation of policy documents on education. The importance they discuss can be summarised in two points. Firstly, they argue that “[there] is no doubt that decentralisation means that several local policymaking arenas appear” and they mean that the policymaking arena can expand into the implementation arena, i.e. to the municipality, the school districts within the municipality, but it may also expand into every individual preschool and school. (p. 174). Secondly, they state that “the school is a professional organisation” in the sense that activities are carried out by teachers “with a long and specific training”. They stress that individual teacher “has the right to decide how the teaching should be conducted” and furthermore that “the educational management that school leaders can execute, can never be imposed on individual teachers” (p. 176). They argue that, therefore, teachers play an important key role for the successful implementation of education reform, and that the reform “must be perceived as essential for the teachers, constitute a gain for them” (ibid.). These points will be discussed later on in Chapter Five.
Chapter Three
Methodology

3.1 Case Study Design

The research strategy of this study is a qualitative one. The basic case study entails detailed and intensive analysis of a single case, such as a single community, a single school, a single family, and so on. The most common use of the term ‘case’ associates the case study with a location, such as a community or organization (Bryman, 2012). For the present study I have chosen to use a context limited to one preschool, and study a specific phenomenon at this preschool, namely, the implementation of the fundamental values, which is a part of the educational policy of the state.

In his book, Bryman presents five different types of ‘case’, which have been previously distinguished by Yin (Yin, 2009 in Bryman, 2012). Bryman refers to the following terms: the critical case, the extreme or unique case, the representative or typical case, the revelatory case, and the longitudinal case. Bryman prefers to call the representative or typical case an exemplifying case. The objective of this kind of case is to understand the conditions of an everyday occurrence, and Bryman states that in this usage “a case may be chosen because it exemplifies a broader category of which it is a member” (Bryman, 2012, p. 70). I would argue that the case used in this study falls within the scope of this type of case, and therefore can be categorised as an exemplifying case. Bryman argues that the ‘case’ in an exemplifying case study is normally not chosen because it is an unusual case, but rather that it should provide a context that is suitable for the study to be conducted (ibid).

Whether the municipality chosen for this study, Forest municipality, may be said to be representative of municipalities in Sweden is an issue that falls beyond the scope of this study. The chosen municipality does, however, exemplify a broader category of municipalities of which it is a member. The chosen preschool is also an example of a
preschool in the broader categories of both preschools in the municipality and preschools in Sweden. The context of the municipality is something that I do not discuss in this study, i.e., the socio-economic context, etc., but this is something that could warrant further study in the future (see also Chapter Six). In this study I therefore treat the chosen preschool as an example of the broader category of preschools in Sweden.

Using the preschool chosen as an exemplifying case also allows for closer examination of some key social processes that may be valid for – or partly applicable to – other groups of preschool pedagogues. In this study, I use a theoretical approach of implementation and examine the implications of the theoretical deliberations in two particular research sites, a municipality and a preschool (see also Chapter Two).

Three of the most prominent criteria for the evaluation of social research are reliability, replication and validity (Bryman, 2012, p. 69). Validity is distinguished as four different types: measurement validity, internal validity, external validity and ecological validity. Bryman points out that the question of how well the case study fares in the context of the research design criteria depends in large part on how far the researcher feels that these are appropriate for the evaluation of case study research. Some writers on case study research consider that they are appropriate for the evaluation of a case study, but others barely mention them, if at all, according to Bryman. However, the external validity or generalizability is one question on which a great deal of discussion has occurred. Bryman stresses that, “it is important to appreciate that case study researchers do not delude themselves that it is possible to identify typical cases which can be used to represent a certain class of objects” (ibid).

One of the standard criticisms of case study research is that findings deriving from it cannot be generalized. According to Bryman, as an argument against this criticism, case study researchers tend to claim that the aim is to generate “an intensive examination of a single case, in relation to which they engage in a theoretical analysis” (Bryman, 2012, p. 71). The crucial question is not whether the findings can be generalized to a wider universe, but how well the researcher generates theory out of the findings.15 Bryman stresses however that case studies can be associated with both theory generation and

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15 This view of generalization is called ‘analytic generalization’ by Yin (2009) and ‘theoretical generalization’ by J. C. Mitchell (1983) (Bryman, 2012, p. 71).
theory testing. This study uses an theoretical model of implementation for analysis of the findings, thus this study has an aspect of theory testing. However, this study also examines a single case of a preschool intensively apart from the theory, so this study also makes claims of – if not theory generation – at least of attempting to find some more generally valid rationale behind the processes of implementation.

3.2 Unstructured and Semi-Structured Interviews

Among the several different types of interviews associated with qualitative research, unstructured and semi-structured interview were adopted as data collection methods in this study. In both cases, the interview process is flexible. Open-ended questions are used and “the emphasis must be on how the interviewee frames and understands issues and events – that is, what the interviewee views as important in explaining and understanding events, patterns, and forms of behaviour”. (Bryman, p. 471)

In this study, I adopted a unstructured interview to the interview for the principal of the chosen preschool, the reason being that the writer foresaw the possibility that there could be important points which could not predicted and therefore could not be formed as questions. Such important points may surface if and when the interviewee is allowed to talk more freely. In the unstructured interview, as Bryman (2012) states, “the researcher uses at most an interview guide as a brief set of prompts for him- or herself, which deal with a certain range of topics” (p. 471). The writer asked only a single question to the principal, i.e. “Please talk all of things about the fundamental values that you know”. The principal, the interviewee was then “allowed to respond freely, with the interviewer simply responding to points that seem worthy of being followed up” (ibid).

On the other hand, a semi-structured interview was adopted for the pedagogues, because the writer has had fairly clear focus on some points, but also wanted to emphasize the interviewee’s perspectives and understanding. I had a series of questions, often referred to as an interview guide, that are in the general form of an interview schedule, but, as Bryman states, the interviewee had “a great deal of leeway in how to reply” (ibid). The order of questions did not follow the exact order of the interview guide, and the interviewer added questions to follow-up on things said by the interviewees in
their replies to other questions. All questions were – more or less – be asked, and the wording of the questions were the same with each interviewee.

All of the interviews took place within the preschool premises, where the interviewee is in his or her natural surroundings. In this way, the interviewee can feel more relaxed, which may create an atmosphere in which it is easier to reply to the questions.

For a good and successful interview, there are several conditions before and during the interview that should be considered, e.g. the place, atmosphere, attitude of interviewer and so on. The interviews were recorded on a digital recorder for the sake of the following analysis and the writing of the report, and then transcribed. For the sake of the interviewee, these recordings will be deleted after completing this study.

3.3 Ethical Considerations

When social research is to be conducted, it is crucial that all ethical issues are considered, especially when individual participants are used as sources, or are involved in the research in other ways. There is potential risk that loss may be incurred, by participants, related organization, etc., or that they are disadvantaged in other ways.

Among the authors on social research, there are different stances on ethics. Each researcher needs to consider ethical issues carefully in his or her research. The ethical concern can be broken down into four main areas: harm to participants, lack of informed consent, invasion of privacy, and deception. Here, the writer considers the ethical issues in accordance with these four points.

‘Harm to participants’ refers not only to physical harm but also harm to participants’ development, loss of self-esteem, stress and ‘inducing subjects to perform reprehensible acts’. As the Social Research Association (SRA) states in the SRA’s Ethical Guidelines, “social researchers should try to minimize disturbance both to subjects themselves and to the subjects’ relationships with their environment” (p. 45).

The issue of harm to participants is further addressed in ethical codes by advocating care over maintaining the confidentiality of records (Bryman, 2012). In concrete terms, this means that the identities and records of individuals should be maintained as
confidential. This also means that care needs to be taken when findings are being published to ensure that individuals are not identified or identifiable.

The second area is ‘lack of informed consent’. This principal means that prospective research participants should be given as much information as might be needed in order for them to make an informed decision about whether or not they wish to participate in a study (Bryman, 2012). Covert observation transgresses that principle, because participants are not given the opportunity to refuse to cooperate (ibid). However, implementing the principle of informed consent is “easier said than done”. In Bryman’s book, various opinions about covert observation are introduced and discussed. The writer did indeed face similar problems on this principle in the present study. In Chapter Five, one of the results has been drawn from participant observations at a time when the writer took part in a parents’ meeting, as a parent. That means that at that time the writer took part in a school related meeting in the capacity of a parent and not a researcher. This meeting was held more than six months before the writer decided to conduct this study, and therefore, no information about this study could be given to the other participants of the meeting. That means also that the writer took part in the meetings, not with the purpose of being a researcher, but only as a parent. The content of the meetings have, however, been used in this study, as the results of participant observations. Since the writer decided to use some of these observations – originally made as a private person – in the present research, an issue of privacy arose. The writer discussed this matter with the principal of the preschool, and confirmed that the information could be included in the present study without being a case of ‘deception’ (see below).

If the third area, ‘privacy principle’, were to be invaded, it may cause harm to participants as a consequence. Anonymity and confidentiality were of great concern when the present research was planned and also when the writer conducted this study.

The fourth area, ‘deception’, occurs typically in experimental research, for example, a lack of informed consent could lead to deception. Such kind of deception tends to occur unconsciously, and therefore researchers need to be careful and duly concerned about the matter.
3.4 Process of Research

For achieving the purpose of this study, the writer conducted research both in a municipality with the name ‘Forest’ in Stockholm County, and a preschool with the name ‘White Lamb’. The ‘Forest’ and the ‘White Lamb’ are fictitious names, which the writer has given to comply with the need for anonymity. Prior to the research, the writer gathered different information and materials on the Internet, which relate to preschools in the municipality and also relate to the preschool White Lamb. Some documents published by the municipality were analysed for examining the municipality. On the other hand, unstructured and semi-structured interviews were adopted as the methods of the research in the preschool.

Interviews were conducted with four people – one principal and three pedagogues – in the preschool.16 As mentioned in the section 3.2, unstructured interview was adopted for the principal. For the three pedagogues, a semi-structured interview was adopted.

With concern for confidentiality, the three pedagogues are indicated with the names Teacher A, Child minder B and Child minder C, for the purpose of this study. These names have no relation to gender. Furthermore, no information of age or details of personal background have been disclosed. Other ethical considerations have also been made (see Section 3.3). After the interviews were conducted, all of the information from the research was analysed. For the analysis of the results of research, the writer has used the theoretical approach of Lindensjö and Lundgren, and relevant concepts of the fundamental values and values education (see Chapter Two).

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16 In this study, the concept pedagogue is used as the collective name for the occupational groups, pre-school teachers and child minders.
Chapter Four
Findings and Analysis

As the writer mentioned in Chapter One, the aim of this study is to understand the process and outcome of implementing the goals of education policy, the fundamental values, at a micro level.

In this chapter, the results of both of the research at a municipal level and a preschool level, respectively, are presented. Firstly, the chosen municipality, anonymous name Forest municipality, i.e. the mezzo level, is examined with the focus on ‘formulation’ and ‘evaluation’ of the fundamental values of the national curriculum for preschool. Information and materials that are published by the municipality is analysed.

In the next section, 4.2, the results of the research of the chosen preschool White Lamb, i.e. the micro level, are presented. The purpose of the research here is to investigate the process and the outcomes of the implementation of the fundamental values. The main focus of section 4.2 is on the creation and its usage of the five fundamental value keywords, those have been chosen by the school district to which the preschool belonged, in a democratic way. It is also the focus of what relationship the preschool and the municipality have on the implementation process.

Through the research, the writer keeps in mind the sentences of the fundamental values that were mentioned in Chapter Two. The methods the writer used are unstructured interview and semi-structured interview. The interviewees were the principal and three pedagogue at preschool White Lamb. The writer named the pedagogue teacher A, child minder B and child minder C for the sake of anonymity.
4.1 Implementation of Fundamental Democratic Values in Municipality (Mezzo Level)

4.1.1 Abstract of Chosen Municipality and Its Organisation Related to Education

The preschool chosen for the present research is located in Forest municipality, a part of Stockholm County. Forest municipality conducts preschool activities in 22 municipal preschool units, as well as 26 privately run preschools, which are supervised and assessed by the Education Board. The municipal preschools take care of approximately 1,600 children (Utbildningsnämnden, 2015).

The organisation of education in the selected municipality can be seen graphically in Figure 3 below. The Education Board, with its related Education Committee, is the body responsible for preschools, pedagogical care and schools (The selected municipality, Utbildningsnämnden, n.d.). The Education Committee, which is governed by the Education Board and the Culture and Leisure Board, carries out the actual concrete administrative work for preschools and schools.

Figure 3: The organisation related to education in Forest municipality (excerpt from the whole of the organisation).

In 2017, the Education Committee changed name to the Learning and Culture Administration. In this study the writer uses the former name “the Education Committee” that was used when the research was conducted.
In the next section, the Systematic Quality Work for preschools in Forest municipality, its formulation and evaluation is examined with the second objective of this study. Especially the following viewpoints are in focus: What framework does the municipality apply for the implementation of the fundamental values? Are the fundamental values of the national curriculum re-formulated at the municipality (Mezzo level)? Does the municipality take some actions for preschools to implement the fundamental values of the curriculum?

4.1.2 The Framework of the Systematic Quality Work

The framework of the Systematic Quality Work is a quite new method for the execution/implementation of the national educational policy. Skolverket introduced regulations for the Systematic Quality Work (Skolverket, n.d.), after the concept itself became a part of the revised Education Act of 2010. How does the municipality exercise the method? There are three actors, namely: Education Board, Preschools, and the Education Committee, as indicated in Figure 4 below.

![Figure 4: The Systematic Quality Work on education in Forest municipality](image)

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These three actors conduct the Systematic Quality Work by 3 steps as follows.

Step 1: The Education Board adheres to the municipality’s visions and the strategic goals, and at the same time determines its own ‘mission statement’ for preschools and schools (Utbildningsnämnden, 2015).

Step 2: Preschools conduct their Systematic Quality Work by following the material “Schools and Preschools Systematic Quality Work: Guidance and Structure” (The selected municipality, n.d.), that is made by the Education Committee. At the end of the school year, each preschool writes a “quality report” and submits it to the Education Committee.

Step 3: The Education Committee conducts its Systematic Quality Work by monitoring and following up on preschools’ activities in several ways according to its yearly schedule. The monitoring consists of both qualitative and quantitative methods. At the end of the school year, they compile all preschools’ quality reports and submit it to the Education Board.

Step 1': The Education Board conducts its Systematic Quality Work by evaluating all activities at preschools, schools and leisure centres at the end of the school year – by analysing the quality report submitted by the Education Committee – on the basis of the national and municipal goals, and according to its own mission statement. The results are published as a yearly report, “The Education Board Activity Report”. Then the Systematic Quality Work returns to step 1 in the process again, and so on.

4.1.3 The Initiatives of the Municipality for Implementation of the Curriculum

As mentioned in the previous section, the Education Committee has created guidance material for preschools and schools to execute their activities within the framework of the Systematic Quality Work. Actually, this material was made by a new administrative unit “unit for Quality, Development and Research” (hereafter: UQDR), which has been established within the Education Committee. This unit seems to be an invention of Forest municipality, created around 2010 (Skolinspektionen, 2012). The reason for setting up this unit was that the municipality had noted that the systematic quality work was too ‘straggly’ (ibid.). The aim of creating the unit UQDR was that “the unit will create a

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19 The vision of the municipality is to “have the best schools and preschools” (Utbildningsnämnden, 2015).
system for the quality work to be followed by all educational units” (ibid., pp. 5-6). In the same report the work of the UQDR was described as the UQDR visiting all educational units, including preschools, “holding dialogues with principals and teachers at each of the educational units as a follow-up […] on the results of the work for the fundamental values” (ibid.).

As these facts show, firstly, Forest municipality has taken the initiative and created a new unit for executing the national educational policy, the Systematic Quality Work. One can say that the fundamental values are concretely handled within the Education Committee, which includes the UQDR.

On April 5, 2012, the Education Board raised an issue relating to the Systematic Quality Work, and it was decided at this meeting that the Education Committee was to produce common guidelines for this purpose. UQDR then created the central guidance about the Systematic Quality Work – “Schools and Preschools Systematic Quality Work: Guidance and Structure” (The selected municipality, n.d.) – which was issued from the municipality to preschools and schools.

4.1.4 The Actions of the Municipality for the Implementation of the Curriculum

4.1.4.1 The Contents of Guidance for the Systematic Quality Work

The guidance entitled “Schools and Preschools Systematic Quality Work: Guidance and Structure” (The selected municipality, n.d.) which was created by the UQDR consists of 13 pages. The title of the introduction part is “The common Systematic Quality Work at Forest municipality” and it is clear that the guidance is created for creating equal condition for executing the Systematic Quality Work on the activities at the preschools and schools in the municipality (ibid.). After the introduction part, the text continues with the definitions of ‘Quality’ and ‘Structure of Goals’ from the national level to the municipal level, and further to the level of each individual preschool and school. In the

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20 I contacted the registrar of the education committee in the municipality via E-mail the 27th April 2015 and received the answer to this fact in the same day.
guidance one can see how the municipality perceives “quality” within preschools and schools, and the term is used generically to denote to what extent the activities: (1) meet national goals and correspond to national requirements and guidelines, (2) meet local goals of Forest municipality, and (3) are characterized by a strive for innovation and constant improvements based on the particular circumstances of the preschool and school (ibid.). After the section of ‘Quality’ and ‘Structure of Goals’ three sections follow: Routines for the Education Committee’s systematic quality work, Guideline for quality work of activities, and Guideline for quality report of activities.\(^\text{21}\)

As a whole, one can say that this guidance exists for the implementation of both national goals (the curriculum) and municipal goals. This guidance shows the ideal process for meeting the objectives of the curriculum and the procedure for evaluation. The focus of the guidance is on the ‘structure’ and the ‘system’ for executing the Systematic Quality Work and its procedure. On the other hand, there are no statements relating to how the municipality should interpret the Education Act and the curricula, or more concretely, how the phrases and words in those regulative documents should be interpreted. In other words, there is no explicit and evident operationalization/interpretation of the Education Act and the curricula, and no inferences on practical applications suitable to the situation of the local municipality. The municipal perspective of Systematic Quality Work in preschools (and schools) is a perspective of execution only. Thus, the interpretation will depend on the micro level, i.e. the context of each preschool.\(^\text{22}\)

\[\text{4.1.4.2 Routines of the Education Committee on the Systematic Quality Work}\]

The guidance also shows how the municipality follows up preschool (and school) activities in the section ‘Routines for Education Committee’s Systematic Quality Work’. As a whole, the routine of the Education Committee can be divided into two parts: evaluation and follow-up of all the educational units in the municipality, including

\(^{21}\) The guidance is applied both to municipality-driven preschools and schools, and there is no specific guidance for preschools.

\(^{22}\) There was a school district system for a long time in Forest municipality, but on August 1, 2013, this zoning system was removed in favour of a group-wide organization with two heads of all municipal preschools and schools. The purpose of this change was to create a group with a greater equivalence of the educational activities. (Education Board, 2014).
In the municipality, every preschool evaluate its own activities and submit a ‘Quality Report’ at the end of each school year. The reports from all of the preschools are used as one of the pieces of material when the Education Committee follows up on the activities and makes its annual Quality Report. In the Quality Report, every preschool presents its attainment, result and analysis of three respective goal areas.

What is noteworthy is that a qualitative method of ‘dialogue’ is often used when the Education Committee follows up on a preschool’s activities. Complementing the methods of statistical and quantitative research, there are three different kinds of ‘dialogues’ conducted, namely: Yearly quality dialogues of the operations; Dialogues between principals; and the Quality forum. The first one occurs once a year, and is a dialogue in a group consisting of students, pedagogues and parents. The second one is assumed also to take place once a year, and this is a dialogue between the preschool principal and the head of the UQDR. The third one takes place six times a year, and at these occasions school and preschool headmasters gather to discuss topics relating to the Quality Work. Using ‘dialogues’ to follow up the quality work seems to be in line with the perspective of Skolverket, i.e. ‘deliberative democracy’. In the next section the details of the dialogues are discussed concretely.

4.1.4.3 Evaluation of the Execution on the Fundamental Values at Preschools – Quality Report by the Education Committee

As mentioned in the previous section, the results of following up the preschool and school activities are presented in the annual report “Quality Report by the Education Committee”. The report for the school year 2012-2013 (published in 2014) has 122 pages and the section on preschools covers 10 pages. In this section the Education Committee focuses on how the fundamental values are evaluated.

For the report, evaluation was conducted mainly through ‘Quality Monitoring’. The material used for the Quality Monitoring consist of ‘Children and Pedagogues Statistic’, ‘Quality Report’ from preschools, ‘Quality Monitoring Dialogue’, and ‘Regular

23 It is not clear if children in preschool participate in this dialogue.
24 There is a yearly report by Education Board, namely: Education Board Working Report [Sw: Utbildningsnämndens verksamhetsberättelse]. However this report covers wide areas of municipal education, and there are no concrete pieces of information that relate to the fundamental values and the policy regarding them.
Investigation’. That is to say, both quantitative and qualitative methods of evaluation have been applied. The results of the evaluation expound ‘strong points’, ‘points to develop’, and ‘points to improve’. Quality Monitoring is the main method that the Education Committee adopts for following up the essential aspects of the quality in education, which includes the fundamental values.

When one reads the report in accordance with the perspective of the stipulated fundamental values at the National level, two sections in the report – ‘Children’s influence’ (p. 23) and ‘Work against discrimination and insulting treatment’ (pp. 23-25) – directly relate to the fundamental values. These two evaluation points are based on the method of ‘Qualitative Dialogue’ with pedagogues and principals, i.e. a qualitative method. The report states the following points as the good results of the execution of the fundamental values, and states that “the preschools in Forest municipality reaches generally good results”:

1. Several preschools have children councils, meetings between pedagogues and children representatives. These meetings create understanding and respect among the children, and they perceive themselves as participants.

2. Several of the pedagogues describe the importance of listening to the children, and that it is often a matter of organisation if it is possible to go through with the children’s suggestions of different activities.

3. Many pedagogues also say that the children are made to vote – “the children love voting”. The preschools’ democratic mission is clearly noticeable.

4. According to the principals, the preschools work with children’s influence through children councils/meetings, interviews with the children, and by letting the children choose activities and material. “The children are allowed to choose and decide very much”. The principals’ statements further relate to how children are invited to influence the pedagogic environment at the preschool, and the importance of listening to children.

Reading the list above in accordance with the fundamental value, there are two words that stand out (see the underlined words in the quote above): ‘participation’ and ‘respect’. Furthermore, expressions like ‘Children’s suggestion’, ‘to choose’, ‘to vote’, ‘to decide’ are expressions that also connected to the fundamental values like ‘self-decision’ ‘responsibility’, and ‘participation’. Other expressions, such as ‘listening to the children’
connects to ‘to respect everybody’ and ‘understand the other’s stand point’ in the fundamental values in the curriculum.

The section “Work against discrimination and offensive treatment” (pp. 23-25) has a similar meaning to the first sentence of the fundamental values in the national curriculum, i.e. “The inviolability of human life” (The curriculum for preschool, 2010, p. 1). The title of the section also relates directly to the fundamental value ‘Equality between the genders’ and the operationalized value ‘to value gender differences and similarities’. Thus, from the above, it would be possible to conclude that there are many wordings in the report that directly express or are expressive of the fundamental values.

Besides the evaluation of the fundamental values above, the analyses in the report contain also the viewpoint that the goal achievement of preschools is not easy to measure. The report states that “[t]he Curriculum for Preschool contains, unlike school, aims to strive for, which means that the goal achievement may be unclear” (p. 25). As is obvious from this, the municipality is aware of that goal achievement is not easy to measure, especially in preschools, where the aims are something “to strive for” – goals to work towards.

On the whole, in order to evaluate the activities at preschools, the Education Committee in Forest municipality has decided to use both what is referred to as a ‘Regular Investigation’ and a ‘Quality Monitoring Dialogue’ with pedagogues and principals in preschools as well as with parents/legal guardians. The former one is a quantitative method and the latter is a qualitative method. The evaluation of the fundamental values appears in the “Quality Report by the Education Committee” and this evaluation is based on the results obtained by and through the qualitative method, that is, the ‘Quality Monitoring Dialogue’. This fact may be important for evaluation of the fundamental values in preschool. This point will be discussed later in Chapter Five.
4.2 Implementation of Fundamental Democratic Values in the Preschool ‘White Lamb’ (Micro Level)

‘White Lamb’ is a municipal-driven preschool established in 1978. White Lamb is a small-size facility with 56 children from 1 to 5 years of age, divided in two age groups, and 16 pedagogues and one principal. White Lamb is located in a peaceful environment, immediately near a forest. When one enters through the gate – which has a safety device to keep the children within the premises – one can see the one-story house and the playground. Each and every member of the pedagogues and the principal know the names of all of the children regardless of which group they belong to, and the children are greeted upon arrival in the morning and when they leave in the afternoon.²⁵

According to the principal, the daily activities are based on the stipulations in one law, The Education Act, and four other documents: The Curriculum for Preschool, The Equal Treatment Plan from The Equality Ombudsman (DO), and The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The pedagogues refer to publications from Skolverket, academic study reports, and so on, to get inspiration and to apply new methods in their daily activities. The principal said that the pedagogues get ideas from a variety of such sources and also from their own experiences.

Yearly administrative tasks are carried out on the basis of the guidance given by Education Committee (See section 4.1.4). They use many evaluation methods proposed in the guidance by UQDR, such as BRUK;²⁶ Reflection meetings; Work team meetings; Work place meetings; Evaluation within work teams, children/pupils, and guardian; Documentation; Pedagogic documentation; Regular investigation, etc. In the end of a school year they submit a “Quality Report” to the municipality. Each year “The Equal Treatment Plan”, which indicates measures taken against bullying, is also submitted to the municipality. This plan should follow the directions given by the Discrimination Ombudsman.

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²⁵ The description is based on the writer’s personal observation.
²⁶ BRUK is a digital self-evaluating tool for preschools and schools, and a part of the Systematic Quality Work (Skolverket, n.d.).
On the municipality website (The selected Municipality, n.d.), White Lamb has published five points that are at the core of its activities: Fundamental Values, Play, Language, Children’s Influence, and Collaboration with Parents. Under the subheading “Fundamental Value”, it says:

The daily activities are permeated by our five fundamental value words: respect, joy of living, security, knowledge and social competence. We want to use them to give children a good start in life. We observe children’s development with the model RUS and train children’s sociality. (Emphasize by the writer)

In the present research, the writer has found that the five fundamental value words (hereafter referred to as ‘the five keywords’) quoted above function as the symbolic words for their daily activities. In the following sections concrete practices on their activities with the five keywords are examined.

4.2.1 Selection of ‘Five Keywords’

The pedagogues at the preschool use those “five keywords” of fundamental values everyday, i.e. when they plan, operate, and evaluate their activities. As seen in the above quote in the previous section, the five keywords are: Respect, Joy of Living, Security, Knowledge and Social Competence. As the writer mentioned in the previous section, the preschool follows the Education Act, the curriculum, general recommendations and the other official materials. The five keywords, however, seem to be used on a more practical level in the preschool. When comparing these keywords to the stipulated fundamental values in the curriculum, ‘Respect’ is the same word and this word is directly described in the phrases that are stipulated as the fundamental values in the curriculum. The other four words also seem to have some relation to the stipulated fundamental values, but here the connection is not as obvious. This leads to an issue about how the five keywords were selected and how they are being used in the daily activities?

27 The words in Swedish: Kunskap, Social Kompetens, Livsglädje, Respekt, and Trygghet.
Up until 2013 there was a system of school districts within the municipality. The keywords were selected in the school district (hereafter: district A) to which White Lamb preschool belonged. Until the zoning system of districts in the municipality was abolished in 2013, district A comprised 6 preschools and 4 compulsory schools. The writer interviewed the principal of White Lamb preschool for an explanation of the process of when the five keywords were decided and the reasons behind the decision. According to this explanation, the keywords were selected in 2006 at the leading group meeting of the school district A. In the interview the principal gave me the following outline of the process:

Firstly, all of the pupils in all schools within the district were given the task to list all imaginable value words, and then the pupils were asked to – on an individual basis – check those they thought most important. All of the parents of the pupils also received a paper for selecting value words and were asked to check the words they found to be the most important. Also, the parents of children who attended the preschools had the same opportunity as the parents of children in mandatory schooling. Even the children in the preschools had an opportunity to be part of the selection process. In order to elicit the children’s views, the pedagogues of the preschools would – on repeated occasions – read books that included bullying and insulting expressions. After that, the pedagogue talked to the children about what it means to be “a good friend”, and listed all of the words that came from the children. After all of the words had been gathered, according to the above process, the principals of all preschools and schools, representatives from the preschool pedagogues, and representatives of the pupils within the school district met and selected the words that most people had chosen, and finally, the five keywords were selected.

One of the interviewed pedagogues, Pedagogue B, said that at this final meeting references were made to the national curriculum, making this the basis of the decision. This indicates that both local and grass-root sentiments as well as political decisions were reflected in the process, with more weight put on the local level.

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28 According to the Quality Report of school district A in 2011.
29 At that time she occupied the same position as now, i.e. principal of the White Lamb preschool.
4.2.2 Pedagogue’s Interpretation of the Five Keywords

In this section it is shown how the three interviewed pedagogues (teacher A, child minder B and child minder C) at White Lamb interpret the fundamental values and the five keywords.

4.2.2.1 Interpretation of the Meaning of the Five Keywords

Teacher A gave the answer “Yes” to the question: “Do you think that the five keywords are important for this preschool?” and continued by saying that this is because the five keywords “constitute the fundament when we plan our activities”. Teacher A also said that “the five keywords are part of everything” they do with the children, like ”projects and any other activities”. Teacher A further expressed the situation in terms of that they carry around the five keywords “like a backpack” and they “strive for and try to bring” their five keywords with them “all the time”. Teacher A deems that the five keywords are more of a “how” to follow the National Curriculum: “The five keywords has to do with our approach, the way we meet the children, the way we meet parents, while the national curriculum deals with what we need before our activities, what we shall offer the children in such a way that the five keywords are made visible”.

Teacher A also gave the writer another point of view regarding having the five keywords to relate to, and not only the curriculum. The teacher A said that their activities could work just by using the curriculum, but that “it would probably be difficult, just to have the curriculum and not the fundamental values”. The reason for this being that “all pedagogues at, for example our preschool, probably would go in slightly different directions”. By “different directions” the teacher meant “different ways of thinking” and “also different ways of looking at the children”. However, teacher A continued by remarking: “When we then have the five keywords that tells us how and what to do [gives us] a common idea and view of the children, then it becomes easier to work together”. Child minder B held a similar opinion as teacher A, expressed in the following way: “Without the five keywords the work will be more arbitrary; each teacher may have his or her own ideas and viewpoints, but with the keywords at hand, it is easier to connect concrete happenings to a ‘category’. This makes for more unification in the daily work”.
4.2.2.2 Motivation of Pedagogues

Teacher A states that it would have been more difficult to adapt to the five keywords if they had been “handed down” from the Skolverket, Forest municipality, or any other public institution. To be working at an educational unit (here the ‘White Lamb’ preschool) that has been part of the discussion in the actual choice of the keywords, seems to be a factor of motivation for using the keywords in the daily work, as well as for gaining a deeper understanding of their meaning. Teacher A said that, “I feel that these words [that we are working with] are my words, I can bring them with me and work with them”. Teacher A also commented on how it would have felt if the keywords had been directives from, for example, Forest municipality: “If [they] had said ‘Here are your value words’ then I may have felt like, ‘Hey, what is this?’ I can’t stand behind these values.”

These comments appear to express the importance of having a locally rooted fundament for the daily activities. The writer interprets this in terms of Lundgren/Lindensjö’s notion of “street-level-bureaucrats” – the educational staff who, at the end of the implementation rope, are responsible for the actual implementation of political decisions. Here we have an example of a strong sense of participation, which in turn leads to a stronger motivation. The other interesting point is that teacher A was not working in the area at the time of choosing the value words. Still, teacher A had a consciousness that the five keywords were “my words”, which again implies that they carry a very strong impact with the pedagogues. The writer thinks that this is not only due to the impact of the keywords themselves, but also to the big efforts that are being made to develop and apply the concepts in the everyday work, by interpreting and using them in actual situations.

4.2.2.3 Most Important Keyword Within the Five Keywords

Each of the three pedagogues gave the writer different answers to the last question in the interviews: “Which of the five keywords do you think is the most important one?”

Teacher A replied “social competence”, because teacher A feels that it involves aspects that are important to all the other keywords; without it you may, as a human being, not feel the same joy of life, or, the same security. According to teacher A, social behaviour is the most important part of development when children are small. Child
minder C replied “joy of life” and “respect”, because they symbolise two aspects that were lacking in child minder C’s earlier life as a child and a young adult. They also constitute child minder C’s choice of occupation. A nation is built based on the children, according to child minder C, and there should be joy and happiness. Child minder C also said that a nation must be built on safety: children must feel safe, but child minder C ends by saying that respect and joy of life constitute a basis for a safe and sound nation. On the other hand, Child minder B replied that they are all inter-connected and all are needed to make things work; one does not function on its own. In the opinion of child minder B, it is more like that it is “the social joy of life that respects safety and knowledge”.

I assumed that the replies from the pedagogues would be the same or at least very similar, but as one can see they have very different approaches towards and sentiments attached to the value words. Since all pedagogues are individuals with very different backgrounds and experiences, this would only be natural. On the other hand, the different weight attached to the keywords by different pedagogues gives rise to a broadening discussion among the pedagogues, which in turn would create a positive relation with or dynamic feeling towards the daily activities. However, what makes this possible are the opportunities provided for inter-pedagogue-discussion, for example at reflection meetings, work place meetings, etc.

4.2.3 Keywords in Practice

4.2.3.1 Relation 1: Pedagogue - Pedagogue

According to the principal, during the school year 2014/2015 the preschool had the aim to explore what they call “fundamental value work for adults”. The pedagogues talked repeatedly about different things within the theme – how they interpret, act and work with the fundamental value in their daily work – at the work place meeting that they have once a month, 1.5-2 hours.

The principal stated the reason for taking up the fundamental value words for adults that school year in this way: “I think, hmm, I know that children do not need rules, they need us, the adults, to be good role models.” The principal then continued expounding
views that that action and behaviour is what the children will adopt, not necessarily what you tell them to do or not to do. “The way adults act towards each other, and to other children, is how the children will learn to act towards each other”, says the principal, ending by saying that, “if you are looked down upon and always get scolded, then you will act in that way towards your friends.”

In the work place meeting, they had small-group discussions initially, and then discussed what the groups had talked about in a larger group meeting with all people present. They had many other issues to discuss during these meetings, but value work was a routine topic for every work place meeting. When they talked about this topic, the keywords were used. Only one of the keywords, for example “Social Competence”, was discussed at one specific work place meeting. As a basis for discussion, the principal usually formulated a number of questions. The work place meeting referred to in the interviews conducted for this study was held in April 2015. The theme/keyword was “Social Competence”, and for this meeting the principal had prepared 10 questions. The questions consist of concrete situations within the staff’s work, e.g. “Do I always listen to children firstly, or do I ask children to wait until I have time or until it becomes their turn?” and “What do I do if I feel that a child is being unfairly treated by another adult?”

The questions were structured as simulating typical concrete situations or as a reflection on everyday work. For example, the last of the 10 questions at that particular meeting mentioned above was: “What objectives do I have?” As one of the pedagogues, child minder C, mentioned in the interview, the routine of regular work place meetings gives the pedagogues an opportunity to reflect on themselves and on their daily work, regardless of whether the questions simulate concrete situations or are more of a self-reflecting character.

The questions at the work place meeting mentioned above developed from one of the five keywords, “Social Competence”. This implies that the preschool treats the five keywords as not symbolic objects, but as words that have concrete and practical functions for implementing the stipulated fundamental values in the curriculum. Furthermore, the type of abstract questions mentioned above stimulates thoughts in a wider spectrum, including thoughts on both daily work as well as work satisfaction. One of the interviewees, child minder C, commented that these meetings are very meaningful both professionally and on a personal level: Child minder C says that the stipulated
fundamental values in the curriculum are a foundation for building a good future, and continues by saying that this is something that child minder C believes in but had not experienced as a child, since child minder C was born and grew-up in another country. For child minder C the fundamental values and the five keywords are signs of democracy. According to the explanation of child minder C, the work place meetings are carried out in a democratic manner where each and every pedagogue speaks her or his opinion. If, on the occasion that there are different opinions between pedagogues, the principal makes the decision. Child minder C said, “all of the pedagogues accept the principal’s decision, even if they have different opinions”.

In addition to the monthly work place meetings, each small unit of pedagogues have an hour of Reflection Meetings every week. In this type of meeting the five keywords are also exercised. The reflection meetings are for concrete group planning. According to teacher A, first they reflect on the activities conducted, and then they plan ahead what they shall do further on. Teacher A said that, “since we have the five keywords in our heads, we always bring them with us. Of course we can always get better at using the words, and ponder over them”.

Actually child minder B said that from the experience of B it is normally difficult to discuss how other pedagogues act towards the children, but at the present work place, this has not been a problem and has worked very well: “We can make comments to each other on how we are acting.” One way to handle an uprising conflict between a pedagogue and a child is to tap the affected pedagogue on the shoulder and take over with the words “let’s change now”. Child minder B mentioned that sometimes you may get stuck and cannot find a way out of a possible conflict with a child. Child minder B continued by saying that the five keywords are very useful in the reflection meeting after such occurrences.

Presumably, from the viewpoint of the writer, the five keywords may function as core values or categories, as a tool to more easily analyse situations and conflicts, not only between children but also between pedagogues and children as well. They can act as a tool to find solutions in daily work. The practice in the preschool White Lamb mentioned above also implies, according to the writer, that if the pedagogues act in accordance with the five keywords, this very aspect could be an important part of the implementation of the fundamental values: the daily activities and interactions between
the pedagogues and children are at the very centre of the Implementation arena, at least in this preschool.

4.2.3.2 Relation 2: Pedagogues - Parents

This section contains descriptions – based on observations by the writer – of opportunities for dialogue between pedagogues and parent(s) or legal guardian(s) (hereafter referred to as “parents”, regardless of whether it is a single parent, two parents or any other legal guardian).

Development Dialogue

Twice a year, the preschool offers “development dialogues” between one designated member of the pedagogues and parents.

On these occasions, the keywords function as core concepts when the pedagogues and parents discuss how the child has developed, as well as the current situation for the child. Ahead of the dialogue, the parents receive a paper with a figure listing the keywords and some concrete words that more explicitly express the keyword’s concepts. This paper also includes some questions relating to the child’s situation at the preschool, which the parents are asked to consider before the dialogue (see Appendix 2). When the pedagogues and the parents meet and have a dialogue they talk freely to each other not necessarily following the outline of the paper, but the paper does play an important role in giving structure to the dialogue.

Other Opportunities to Meet

The preschool arranges several opportunities for parents to meet the pedagogues, as well as other parents, in addition to their daily interaction. Among these arrangements is an annual Parents-Pedagogue meeting in which both the parents and the pedagogue meet and talk at the beginning of the school year. After the initial speeches by the principal, and at times a select number of pedagogues, a Q&A session will follow. After that general assembly, the parents are divided into two groups, according to their child’s age group, and the parents take part in discussion with that group. During this group discussion, the parents talk about and discuss their desires and hopes, anxieties and
questions, or anything else they want to transmit to the preschool. The pedagogues present will respond to questions, but are otherwise less active in the discussion, and act more as observers. If required the pedagogue(s) may of course take part in this discussion. The paper with the five keywords and the concrete exemplifications, mentioned above, is used as support for the discussion. The keywords can be of help for the parents to organize their views and opinions, and to create associative chains of thought that will further develop their ideas.

To give one concrete example: At one of these meetings, which the writer attended, a question of gender equality was raised by a parent. The question was based on recent research, which says that teachers, in general, tend to give more attention to boys than to girls, and the question was how the pedagogues of this preschool take measures against this. The pedagogues that attended the meeting responded to this question by giving an outline of the preschool’s gender policy.30

After the group discussions, a selected representative of each group presents what they talked about in front of all the participating parents and pedagogues. I interpret this practice as an example of how the preschool parents participate as partners in the upbringing of, not only their own child(ren), but the other children who attend the preschool. The writer finds this to be an example of how (1) the parents execute their active citizenship, and (2) following the principal’s views that children do as adults do, the actions taken by the parents support the children in becoming active citizens themselves. The keywords do not only function as abstract concepts, but are put into practical use to support active citizenship and promote democratic processes.

4.2.3.3 Relation 3: Pedagogues-Children

In the younger age group at the preschool, there is an activity that relates directly to the fundamental values and to the UN’s Child Convention.

Child minder B states the opinion that the UN Child Convention is of a broader scope than the local keywords, but that in content they are the same. At the preschool there are books that relate to both the UN Child Convention and books that relate to the

30 In the response one aspect was that the preschool did not have any books in which a princess is rescued by a prince on a white horse.
keywords. According to child minder B, these books – relating to the fundamental values and the UN convention – are very popular; the children often ask for them. Sometimes a book is read several times a day, and sometimes more rarely. When reading the books, the pedagogues will together with the children, comment on what is happening: “Oh, he hit him. What shall he do then?” The children then come up with various suggested solutions, such as, hug him, hold him, say something nice, and so on.

**Activities**

Apart from the books that directly relate to value systems (local or global), one issue is how the keywords are used in other daily activities. One interviewee, child minder C, said that the keywords are “used for everything, EVERYTHING” and really stressed this. For example, child minder C says, if one child is a little bit better than the others at, achieving something, the pedagogue will gently intervene in order to promote the other children’s self-esteem and to indicate that everybody should be respected. From the writer’s ad hoc observations, this is done without diminishing the achievements of the child who did something the others could not do.

Furthermore, child minder C meant that the most important tool in the job as a preschool teacher is communication skills. In section 4.2.2.3 above, the writer reported that teacher A believed that Social Competence was the most important keyword. This relates to what child minder C says here about communication, as communication is a crucial aspect of social competence. It is noteworthy that child minder C found Joy of Life and Respect to be the most important words, but communication the most important skill, if we are making a comparison between value concepts and skills.

**4.2.3.4 Relation 4: Pedagogues-Children, Children-Children: “Stop!”**

The pedagogues have introduced the ‘stop’-word, and worked with that quite a lot, especially in the younger age group, around 2 years of age when the children begin to speak more freely. The word, according to the principal, is supposed to be used only in cases where somebody acts in a way that is not agreeable to the individual child. The children are taught that ‘stop’ means stop, and if somebody says ‘stop’ then they have to listen to their friends. One example, from my observations, is a case when a child (A)
was peddling a tricycle, and another child (B) on another tricycle was hitting the tricycle of child A repeatedly from behind. Child A then said, “No, stop!” and then moved the tricycle away adding, “Now you can pass.” Child B then quit. The ‘stop’-word may also be used by a pedagogue when a child is acting wrongfully or hazardingly in some way. One example of this, given by the principal, is when a child is throwing sand at another child – whether in frustration or play – and the victimized child is not reacting by using the ‘stop’-word.

### 4.2.4 Outcome of Keywords: Characteristics of the Implementation

In this section, I concentrate on summarising the outcomes of practices in White Lamb. A discussion about the implementation comes in the Chapter Five. The school district decided to choose what the main stakeholders in the district (pedagogue, teachers, parents, pupils, and children) found to be the most important value words, and the process of which can be characterized as a democratic procedure. The effects that I have found are that (1) some stakeholders seem to feel that the keywords are their own words (locally rooted), and (2) that this sense of “belonging” creates a consciousness which leads them to be relatively more active or more motivated to actually use the value words in daily activities.

The methods for practically employing the fundamental value words are not limited to books and theories on the subject, but the pedagogues continuously seek to improve the quality of their work. They seek different ways, and then evaluate the effects of their activities on a regular basis.

This evaluation takes place at the preschool, in work place meetings, and reflection meetings. The pedagogues reflect and rethink the concepts contained in the five value words on everyday daily basis. That is to say, they adopt “formative evaluation”. They seem to have created routines in order to continuously refresh their own thinking about the keywords and fundamental values.

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31 Pedagogues also teach children to say “No” or other similar simple words to communicate to others. The example of “Stop!” was the result of the pedagogues’ search for a better method.
It seems that the keywords can be of help to both parents and pedagogues in looking back and thinking of the child, and his or her development in a rational and constructive way. The preschool provides opportunities for the parents to participate in the daily work on the fundamental values, and the keywords function as material, by providing various aspects of the children’s behaviour. In this respect, and from my observational experience, the keywords appear to be an efficient tool. Thus, I would argue that the keywords function both on a ‘philosophical’ and a ‘practical’ level. As one of the pedagogues stated, the keywords are the concepts that the pedagogues bring along in his or her backpack. Therefore, the keywords are not only a range of words, but each word is discussed and developed with the possibility of interpreting and re-interpreting of its meaning and how it is used, in the opportunities given at work place meetings and reflection meetings as mentioned above. I would say that the pedagogue carry content with a rich field of possibilities in their backpacks, and it is in their daily work that they give the keywords their concrete meaning by and through these interpretations of the words in their daily work. The keywords function as symbols of the fundamental values, but when put into practice, the words represent a wide denotative field.

To put this in a different way, I believe that the results of this research indicate that the keywords are used directly in the preschool activities not only a practical level – including the reading activities with the UN convention book, development dialogues, parent meetings, etc. – but that the keywords function as the philosophical backbone for both the pedagogue and the principal as well. In other words, they are at the core of planning and executing all activities. This ‘philosophical backbone’ seems to have developed through discussions amongst pedagogue and the principal as well as between pedagogue and parents.

The parents were involved in the process of developing the keywords and, on what I would call the ‘external level’, the parents have been acting as active participants in the democratic processes. The research has shown that the parents are also invited into a dialogue with the preschool – in the every-day interactions, development dialogues, and parent meetings – and that each parent’s individual sense of values may also have an effect on what then may be referred to as the ‘internal level’.

One more aspect of the importance of the keywords in the daily activities is that the pedagogue seem to have a strong consciousness of the keywords being their “own
words”; one of the pedagogues, teacher A, said that s/he regarded the value words as values of “their own school district”. They appear to be conscious of the fact that the keywords have not been given to them from above, from the municipality or other public institution.

Finally, all of the three pedagogues have different ways of thinking about which value word they feel is most important. This is, of course, a natural course, and more of an asset than a problem, from my perspective. All teachers have different experiences, both in private lives and as teachers. I would argue that a situation where different members of the pedagogue give different weight or meaning to the value words, creates meaningful discussions and that the discussions become, in themselves, a practice of democracy.
Chapter Five
Discussion

After the presentation and analysis of the findings that emerged from document analysis of the municipality and the interviews in the preschool, this section will discuss the findings using the theoretical frameworks and the conceptual framework presented earlier. This section is divided into two main parts, and discusses, firstly, implementation, and secondly, decentralisation issues. This study has clarified some aspects of the implementation of the fundamental democratic values at a Swedish preschool.

5.1 Implementation

5.1.1 The Nature of the Decentralized System: A Discussion of Division Between the Policymaking Arena and the Implementation Arena

The findings about the implementation process of the fundamental democratic values to the preschool can be summarized in the following way:

1) The goals were set by the state. Fundamental values are stipulated in the Education Act.
2) The formulation of guidelines was made by Skolverket, in the forms of, e.g. Curriculum, General recommendations, including “Systematic Quality Work”, and several other support materials.
3) The municipality allocated budget, issued guidance in line with the Systematic Quality Work for preschools and also arranged many in-service training occasions for both pedagogue and principals. The municipality evaluated preschool activities, which included the fundamental values, by means of both qualitative and quantitative methods.
4) The interpretation of the goals (=Education Act and the curriculum) that include the fundamental values took place in the preschool and the school district A, but not in the municipality.
5) Each of the activities and evaluations at the preschool that included the fundamental values were conducted within the framework of the Systematic Quality Work. The Systematic Quality Work combined all of the actors around preschool education, from each individual preschool to the municipality, as well as on the national level; this contributed to a continuous checking and improvement at each level.

In this process (1) – (5), one can see the clear division between the policymaking arena (1) and (2), and the implementation arena (3) and (4). Within the highly decentralized Swedish education system, the Swedish government has set goals that include fundamental values in education- but the government has no direct control over individual preschools and their staff. The intention of the government is implemented through Skolverket and is expressed in guidelines that consist of the curriculum, general recommendations and support materials. In this process, there is also no central control over any preschools; only guidelines are issued. The national curriculum stipulates the fundamental values, as well as the goals and guidelines for the activities (Skolverket, 2010)- but as Engdahl states, the curriculum “[does] not stipulate how these goals are to be attained” (2004, p. 4).

In Chapter Four, as one of the results of the study, the writer has found that Forest municipality has not made any interpretation or operationalization of the fundamental value statements in the guidance for preschools and schools. This fact was against the writer’s initial assumptions. Before commencing with the present research, the writer assumed that the municipality had interpreted the fundamental values of the national curriculum for implementation at preschools. The writer’s assumption was based on the seemingly abstract character of the values, and what were perceived as difficulties for each preschool to interpret and execute these values. Furthermore, the writer thought that there would also be a risk of different preschools making different interpretations, which in turn would be an obstacle in achieving the national goals. However, there was no direct interpretation of the values by the municipality. As mentioned above, the municipal perspective of quality in preschools is a perspective of execution (see Section 4.1), not an interpretation of the curriculum, i.e. the national policy. They look at “how leadership is exercised, what the organization of the educational work looks like” (Education Committee, n.d.).
The writer argues that the situation described above is in correspondence with both ‘the division between the policymaking arena and the implementation arena’ in the theoretical approach of Lindensjö and Lundgren (see Section 2.3.1).

The reproduction paradox creates on the one hand a strong division between the policymaking arena and the implementation arena, and furthermore, a division within the implementation arena. The former means that the decision making of overall goals, detailed planning of courses, and so on, are decided in the policymaking arena, but teachers are perceived as meaningful actors in the implementation arena since they are the ones who decide on methods and how to carry out the contents of the courses.

What seems to be an important finding of this research, and what may need to be discussed in relation to the theoretical approaches is that the school district decided and chose five value keywords. Is this action part of the “local level policymaking” or the “implementation”? Discussions in the school district regarding the choice of keywords were carried out in 2006, eight years after Skolverket issued the new curriculum for preschool and twelve years after the new curriculum for school. Based on this time lag, one might assume that the action of selecting the keywords was not conducted because of the new curricula; the principal did not even remember the details of the situation, and the reasons for selecting the value words used in her own school district. According to the principal, the other principals in the school district did, however, refer to the national curriculum in the final meeting for selecting the keywords. The people who participated in the school district’s discussions were not restrained by the curriculum when they selected value words, and they referred to the curriculum only at the very end of the process as a confirmation of alignment with national policy (see Section 4.2.1). Considering that the district decided to select its own value words freely, the writer would argue that this process could be perceived as a sort of policymaking. Lindensjö and Lundgren stress that the policymaking arena can expand into the implementation arena in a decentralized educational system (see Section 2.3.1), and the actions of school district A are, in the writer’s understanding, such a case.32 However, the action of

32 From 2012, school district system in Forest municipality has been removed.
selecting the five keywords also has a characteristic of implementation. This will be discussed in the following section.

5.1.2 Difficulties of Implementation

In this paper it has been described that the municipality (Mezzo Level) and the preschool (Micro level) have worked together within the framework of the Systematic Quality Work (see Chapter Four). The Education Act (2010) stipulates each role of preschools and schools, municipalities and Skolverket within the Systematic Quality Work and it is therefore obvious that this framework has been expected to work as the central framework for controlling proper implementation of the national education policy.

Under the decentralized condition, state level authorities cannot take measures directly to municipalities and preschools about how they should exercise the curriculum in practice, instead, one can say that the state level authorities designated “devices” to be used. Skolverket has not only decided the curriculum, but guidelines of how to exercise the curriculum in practice – the Systematic Quality Work – indicating how municipality, preschool and school should plan, exercise, follow-up on and evaluate their activities. The Forest municipality has created the guidance for preschools and schools based on the materials issued by Skolverket. For the state level, this framework has been, and still is, expected to function as the key tool to monitor whether national goals for quality and equity in education are being achieved.

As described in Chapter Four, the interpretation of the curriculum depends on the individual preschool and both planning, execution and evaluation of preschool activities are up to the preschool itself. Everything from making a yearly plan, to the evaluation at the end of the school year is conducted by each individual preschool, in accordance with its factual circumstances, which is also stressed by Skolverket (1998).

The Systematic Quality Work is constituted of guidelines for how the fundamental values stipulated in the curriculum should be exercised and evaluated. The results of the present research show that various ways of evaluations are carried out both at the municipal level and at the preschool level. The same process of evaluation at preschools was pointed out in the study conducted by Skolverket (2008, p. 21), and this paper
supports the result of the report. The pedagogue and the principal at the preschool are assessed by their ‘effort’ in their activities for the implementation of the fundamental values. In the present research, the preschool has used several methods of evaluation – e.g. self-evaluation and colleague evaluation – to exercise and evaluate their activities, including the fundamental values. Also the municipality members have had ‘Quality Dialogues’ with pedagogues and principals in individual preschools. In these dialogues, some of the fundamental values were points of discussion (see Section 4.1). The yearly Quality Report by the School Committee analyses the execution of the fundamental values based on the Quality Report of preschools. Finally, the Education Board also analyses the implementation of the fundamental values from the perspective of two key points, “Children’s influence” and “Work against discrimination and insulting treatment” which are directly stipulated in the Education Act. This analysis is based on the results of the Quality Report of the Education Committee, and the quantitative parental survey. This situation shows that the execution and the evaluation of the fundamental values in preschools are comprehensively analysed, partly by means of the qualitative method, and partly from quantitative data.

However, there is a question as to what extent one can evaluate whether ‘values’ have actually been implemented. It is obvious that one cannot expect to evaluate this by means of asking children in preschools directly how they have learned and thought about the fundamental values. The implementation goal of the fundamental values in the curriculum for preschool is, therefore, the goal to have ideals to strive for and promote, rather than having a concrete and measurable concept. The municipality itself is aware of – and clearly states – that goal achievement of the fundamental values is not easy to measure, “especially in preschools” (see Section 4.1). As one case of the implementation of the fundamental values at a preschool, this study has revealed the reality of the difficulties of evaluation.

There seems to be no doubt about whether this method of the Systematic Quality Work – among all the actors both in the Policymaking and the Implementation arena – works well or not, is one of the important key points for successful implementation of the curriculum, including the fundamental values. The scope of this study does not, however, allow for any further investigation of how the Systematic Quality Work works in preschools and the municipality.
In the writer’s follow-up investigation, the Quality Report submitted by the preschools in the Forest municipality have so far only been submitted in print, but starting in 2017, all preschools will submit their Quality Reports digitally, using the BRUK evaluation system. This fact indicates that attempts for improvement are continuous.

5.1.3 The Role of the Municipality and Its Leadership

From the results of this study, it is evident that the municipality plays an important role and therefore needs to take initiative in the implementation of the national policy at preschools. To reiterate, in Sweden, the interpretation of the curriculum takes place within each preschool and – following Lindensjö and Lundgren – there is a risk that the authorities lose control, which in turn may lead to the local staff doing things ‘as they like’ resulting in preschool activities being conducted ‘as usual’, without any deeper considerations. A “decentralized” implementation may lead to what Lindensjö and Lundgren refer to as “deconcentration” (Lindensjö and Lundgren, p. 175), or a loss of power and control on behalf of the central authorities.

Skolverket expresses its view on the task of the responsible authority – the municipalities – as “to create the conditions required for the schools to achieve the national goals” (Skolverket, 2008). Having conducted the present research, the writer interprets this in terms that the municipalities are key actors in controlling whether the quality of preschool activities and the equality between different preschools are maintained, and if necessary, improved.

This study has shown that Forest municipality has had its own strategy for the implementation of national educational policies. In the role of the responsible authority, the municipality has taken initiatives to facilitate so that the individual preschools can interpret and execute the curriculum in order to keep – or if necessary, improve – the quality of the educational activities. The municipality created a new administrative section within the Education Committee for the execution of the Systematic Quality

33 Mail contact with a member in UQDR on April 5, 2017.
Work. This section has created the guidance that is used by all of the preschools and schools in the municipality, and to which the Education Committee adheres as well. By means of the guidance and a variety of supporting activities, the committee is continuously giving suggestions to preschools on how the Systematic Quality Work should be exercised in the preschools. The committee is also responsible for creating the necessary conditions (budget, localities, etc.) for all preschools in the municipality in order for them to exercise their activities within the framework of the Systematic Quality Work. The fundamental values are also exercised and evaluated within the same framework.

The writer argues that the strategy of Forest municipality appears to be to support the development of the “capacity” of each preschool, i.e. the capacity of pedagogue and the principal to exercise activities – including the fundamental values – in order to meet the national goals. The municipality conducts three main categories of supporting activities: 1) Several types of in-service training for both principals and pedagogue; 2) Forums for a deeper understanding of the Systematic Quality Work, taking place six times a year, in which all principals of preschools and schools in the municipality, and the UQDR take part; 3) Annual “Quality Dialogues” in order to provide qualitative evaluation and support for the activities, in combination with the quantitative evaluations that each preschool conducts on a yearly basis.

As a follow-up to the investigation (interviews, and document analysis) the writer asked about the role of the unit UQDR in the Education Committee (since 2017, The Learning and Culture Administration) by mail. A member of UQDR replied, and in her reply she pointed out the importance of “dialogue” between the unit and principals and pedagogues of the preschools, in order for the committee to properly evaluate and control the preschools (direct e-mail correspondence on March DD, 2017). From this reply it seems obvious that the UQDR is conscious of the importance of “dialogue” with preschool pedagogues and principals, and it may be in line with the concept of ‘deliberate democracy’ that the curriculum advocates.34

34 The municipality level is of course of certain interest, but it is beyond the scope of this study to penetrate more deeply into the municipality level.
Engdahl points out in her 2004 paper (see Section 1.5) that “most municipalities have repeatedly organised in-service training in order to discuss and to implement the curriculum” (p. 7). After the more than the 10 years that have passed since Engdahl conducted her research, the present paper shows the same thing, i.e. in-service training has been offered continuously and there has also been a development of the variation of the training (see Section 4.1). What should be noted here is the fact that, in 2010 the Education Act was revised and that the Systematic Quality Work was introduced as late as 2015. Compared to 2004, the present situation regarding quality development and evaluation is probably much more systemized and regulated.

5.2 Possibility of Street Level Bureaucrats

The interpretation of the fundamental values in the curriculum depends on each preschool and each pedagogue. This being the case, it is crucial for the successful implementation of the curriculum that each preschool (Micro Level) has a motivation to improve their activities, and to deeply consider their own actions for improvement. As stated in Chapter Five, the writer has found two kinds of interpretations: (1) the interpretation of the curriculum that led to the production of the five keywords; and (2) the interpretation and re-interpretation of the curriculum through the five keywords in the daily activities.

The first point is in regards to the interpretation of the fundamental values within school district A, to which the preschool belonged. The district interpreted the national goals and decided to produce five keywords and, moreover, chose to produce these keywords in a democratic process. They worked with both school children (pupils) and children attending preschools, their parents, as well as school teachers and pedagogues in preschools. The democratic process of producing the five keywords gave the opportunity for children and parents, school teachers and pedagogues of the preschools to think about democracy – fundamental democratic values – and in concrete terms, put democracy in action. It also includes responsibility when the stakeholders are conscious of the fact that the keywords were chosen through a process in which they played an active role. One can say that the fact that these actions were led by school district A are indicative of what Lindensjö and Lundgren, in their theoretical approach, refer to as the “local policymaking
arena(s)” (L&L 2000, p. 174). In the writer’s understanding, this action seems to be both policymaking and implementation, and it also shows a positive example of implementation under the decentralized condition, rather than the risk of “decentralization becoming deconcentration when the control that the school system has had centrally is solely locally delegated” (ibid., p. 174).

The second point is in regards to the interpretation of the principal and the pedagogues in the White Lamb preschool. They interpreted, and still continue to interpret, the concepts of the goal in the framework of Systematic Quality Work given by state level. They have been developing methods of how to apply these interpretations in their daily activities. Furthermore, they have been using the keywords produced by school district A, both directly and indirectly, in other words, this means both on a practical level as well as on a philosophical level.

The points that I found in the research on the chosen preschool have been summarised in the section 5.2, but they show that the national goals of the fundamental values – to some extent – have been achieved in White Lamb preschool.

One of the important points that I would like to emphasize, is that both the ideas behind the daily activities and the actual activities are rooted on the micro level, not belonging to the mezzo level; one of the pedagogues, Teacher A, stated spontaneously in the interview that the pedagogues have the feeling that the five keywords are their “own words” and therefore they are more motivated to use them.

From the above results, I would like to compare the practices observed at the White Lamb preschool with the applied theoretical framework.

As a whole, the implementation at the micro level is conducted in different ways depending on the local situation, in this case, dependent on the pedagogues’ experiences, feelings, and thoughts about the topic at hand. This seems to correspond to the theoretical approach as well, which I mentioned above. Essentially, pedagogues are meaningful actors in the implementation arena, since they are the ones who decide on methods and how to carry out the contents of the courses or daily activities (see Section 4.2).
Chapter Six
Concluding Remarks

Attainments of all of the goals that include fundamental democratic values are contained within the framework of the Systematic Quality Work in the municipality guidance. The interpretation depends on the micro level, i.e. the situation at each preschool. In other words, this means that – in Forest municipality – the national goal of the fundamental democratic values have partly been implemented directly at preschools (interpretation), and partly through the municipality (execution).

6.1 Democracy and Trust, and Active Citizens

The present research is the realisation of a case study of the implementation of the fundamental values at one specific preschool. There were several elements in the results that the writer found to be interrelated: (1) The fundamental values are stipulated clearly and strongly both in the Education Act and the curriculum; (2) The pedagogues in the preschool are conscious of the importance of the fundamental values, and have both the intention and motivation to implement them; (3) The intention and motivation of the pedagogues increased due to the fact that the fundamental values were not decided top-down; they were able to create their own value words (the five keywords) in cooperation with the affected persons, including parents, children, and pupils in school district A, to which the preschool belongs. (4) Several types of discussions and meetings within the preschool have functioned as tools for the pedagogues to maintain the consciousness and motivation. (5) The municipality in which the chosen preschool is located has taken actions to support preschools, principals, and pedagogues to meet the national goals, including the fundamental values.

The five value keywords in the school district A were created when the preschool pedagogues and school teachers – as ‘street-level-bureaucrats’ – were given the freedom
under the decentralized educational system to interpret the curriculum. At the same time, to involve parents, children, and pupils in their activities has been recommended both in the Education Act and the curriculum, as one of the three goals in the restructuring in the 1990s of the Swedish education system: ‘increasing democracy’ (see Introduction).

The fundamental democratic values in the Swedish curricula include elements of ‘deliberative democracy’ (see Section 2.1). The writer would argue that the results of the present study show how preschools in Sweden – through the execution of the curriculum – actually have the possibility to provide opportunities for parents and children to exercise deliberative democracy by participating in the preschool activities.

The activities in Swedish preschools are based on (1) the regulative framework of the curriculum and other materials, which relate to human rights, and (2) the executive and evaluative framework of the Systematic Quality Work. The preschool activities conducted within these frameworks give opportunities to discuss and find solutions to everyday challenges, problems, and conflicts – discussions between pedagogues and children, pedagogues and parents and the experiences of how these discussions can lead to sustainable solutions may be at least a seed for the growth of a trust in the democratic processes that are fundamental for a democratic society. Thus, as Mark Warren says (see Introduction), trust complements and supports deliberation to solve conflict, and the deliberative approach generates in turn trust, both on an interpersonal level but also between individuals and institutions (such as preschools and municipalities). Active participation is of course a necessary but not sufficient condition to solve conflicts by means of deliberation; no problems would be solved by passive participation, and the continuous work at White Lamb to actively apply the five keywords in everyday situations is, in the writer’s opinion, a way to stimulate active participation. Conducting this study the writer has come to believe that this is an important factor for a society to foster active citizens.
6.2 Suggestions for Future Research

The importance of the municipality’s role and initiative will directly affect the level of successful implementation of the national educational policy in Sweden.

In the present study, the writer has concentrated on one preschool in a relatively supportive municipality, with a fairly homogenous population. It would be of great interest to see the differences between this study and a study of the situation in a less homogenous, more multicultural municipality. Furthermore, it would be highly interesting to conduct a study on other levels in the education system. For example, how the notion of deliberative democracy affects high school students in mock elections, and how this notion and the fundamental values are implemented and executed within citizenship education.
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Appendix

Semi structured interview guide

Q1: Do you think that the five value keywords are important for this preschool? If so, please explain why and how?

Q2: Do you think that your activities work when just following the Curriculum without the five value keywords? And why?

Q3: Which of the five keywords do you think is the most important one?

Q4: How do you use the five keywords with other pedagogues, children and parents?