

## Policy Reforms Positioning Preschool Teachers from Invisible to Visible

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### Abstract

Since 1972, Swedish preschool has undergone several policy reforms. Since 2010, preschool teachers have been given increased responsibility for education and its pedagogical content, which preschool teachers have identified as challenging. This study analyzes how policies have positioned preschool teachers and how these policies impact their responsibilities. Drawing on positioning theory and a qualitative analysis of seven policy documents, the study shows that preschool teachers were invisible between 1972 and 2010, gaining visibility after 2010. The findings reveal that policies can both marginalize and reinforce their role. Policy is a key lever for redefining responsibilities and redistributing power. Clarifying shared responsibilities with the educational team is crucial to avoid ambiguity.

### Résumé

Depuis 1972, la préscolarité suédoise a fait l'objet de plusieurs réformes. Depuis 2010, les enseignants de la préscolarité ont reçu une responsabilité accrue pour l'enseignement et son contenu pédagogique, notamment le rôle d'enseignant principal, considéré comme exigeant. Cette étude analyse comment les politiques ont positionné ces enseignants et comment cela influence leurs responsabilités. En s'appuyant sur la théorie du positionnement et une analyse qualitative de sept documents politiques, l'étude montre que les enseignants étaient invisibles entre 1972 et 2010, gagnant en visibilité après 2010. Les résultats révèlent que les politiques peuvent à la

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fois marginaliser et renforcer leur rôle. La politique constitue un levier essentiel pour redéfinir les responsabilités et redistribuer le pouvoir. Clarifier les responsabilités partagées avec l'équipe éducative est crucial pour éviter les ambiguïtés.

**Keywords / Mots clés** : policy, preschool, positioning, preschool teacher, leadership / politique, maternelle, positionnement, enseignant de maternelle, leadership

## Introduction

Swedish preschool has undergone several policy reforms since 1972. The policies provide general advice and guidelines for preschool education where preschool teachers and caregivers work together as a team. In 2010, preschool became an education form within the overall educational system, and teaching was introduced as a new concept (SFS, 2010:800) in which children's learning and development became more central (National Board of Education, 2010). This change involved centring preschool teachers' leadership and stipulating a division of labour between preschool teachers and caregivers. Preschool teachers were given increased responsibility for preschool education and its pedagogical content, including lead teaching because of their academic backgrounds and competence (National Board of Education, 2010, 2018; SFS, 2010:800). However, research has shown that preschool work teams' experience challenges understanding and accepting divisions of labour (Ratcliff, Jones, & Vaden, 2011). Further, preschool teachers do not take on increased responsibilities and positions of power in work teams (Cervantes & Öqvist, 2021; Eriksson, 2014; Gustafsson & Mellgren, 2008; Karila & Kinos, 2012; Steinnes & Haug, 2013), and principals lack the leadership and management skills to create conditions for preschool teachers to take on increased responsibility (Öqvist & Cervantes, 2024). This becomes worrisome when it affects children's access to learning and an equal education. Simultaneously, research emphasizes that curriculum reforms and political pressures rarely manifest in practical work (Cuban, 1993). This is because traditions and culture have a greater impact on implementation than political decisions (Hopmann, 2013). This raises questions of how policy documents have defined preschool teachers' responsibilities and roles over time and whether this might influence their potential to take on leadership roles. Therefore, the aim of this study is to analyze how preschool policies have positioned preschool teachers over time and how they play a role in making it possible for preschool teachers to take increased responsibility for preschool education.

## ***Governance of Swedish preschools***

The Swedish educational system consists of several school forms, each of which has its own national curriculum. In 2010, Swedish preschool became a separate school form and constituted the first stage of the Swedish education system (SFS, 2010:800). There are nearly 9,500 preschools in Sweden, with an enrollment rate of 87 percent among Swedish children aged one to five (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2024). The second stage is compulsory school, starting at age six with a preparatory year and is then followed by nine years. The third stage is upper secondary school, which lasts three years.

Each preschool is managed by a principal, and preschool teachers and caregivers with different educational backgrounds work in work teams. Preschool teachers have higher education, while caregivers have upper secondary education. Swedish preschools were governed by the National Board of Health and Welfare until 1998 when the *Daycare Inquiry* (translated from the Swedish *Barnstugeutredningen*) (SOU, 1972:26; SOU, 1972:27) and the *Pedagogic Program for Preschool* (National Board of Health and Welfare, 1987) became central policy documents for preschools. The *Daycare Inquiry* resulted from an increased need for care as a solution to the labour force requirements, to facilitate women's entry into the labour market, and to support working parents (Hammarström-Lewenhagen, 2013). It was also designed to improve the Swedish preschool system's structure and pedagogy. The *Pedagogical Program for Preschool* was established in 1987 in response to the need to strengthen and clarify the pedagogical role of preschools. Its primary focus was to address the lack of unified national guidelines for pedagogical content and methods to ensure that all children received access to the same high-quality pedagogical support (Hammarström-Lewenhagen, 2013).

Since 1996, Swedish preschool has been governed by the Ministry of Education through national policy documents such as the *Curriculum for Preschool* (National Board of Education, 1998; 2010; 2016; 2018) and the *Educational Act* (SFS, 2010:800). When preschool governance was transferred from the National Board of Welfare to the Ministry of Education, the *Pedagogical Program for Preschool* was replaced by the first preschool curriculum, *Curriculum for Preschool 1998*, which came into force the same year. This marked a significant shift toward children's learning and development, while making preschool a more defined part of the educational system. Preschool, which had previously been rule-governed, became goal-oriented. Fourteen years later, in July 2011, a new *Education Act* (SFS, 2010:800) came into force, and preschool became its own school form with the introduction of teaching and education concepts. The purpose of preschool education is to stimulate children's development and learning, and to provide them with secure care, ensuring that care, development, and learning form a cohesive whole. Preschool is intended to prepare children for continued education. Clearer regulation and governance of preschools enhance the quality of preschool education and teaching (Proposition, 2010). At the same time, the *Curriculum for Preschool 1998*, revised in 2010 (National Board of Education, 2010), came into force but did not mention teaching and education as concepts. The revision was based on the fact that preschool's potential to stimulate children's natural desire to learn had not been fully utilized. Therefore, preschool's pedagogical work was further strengthened to prepare children for future education and lifelong learning and to strengthen systematic quality work. The goals reinforced a subject–didactic orientation (Ministry of Education, 2010). In 2016, a minor revision of the *Curriculum for Preschool* focused on clarifying the transition between preschool, preschool class, and after-school club (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2016). In 2018, a new preschool curriculum was implemented. The main changes were the introduction of teaching and education, emphasizing that preschool was a part of the educational system (National Board of Education, 2018).

The policy documents described above are the focus of this analysis.

**Previous research**

Previous research emphasizes that policy changes in preschool practice influence a preschool teacher's profession as well as status (Eriksson, Svensson & Beach, 2018; Sofou & Tsafos, 2010). Previous changes can be viewed as a means to legitimize preschool education through state-imposed policies (Eriksson, 2015). However, tensions have been identified between national policy and the interpretation of policies in practice, which can lead to problems in a preschool teacher's pedagogical work (Cervantes & Öqvist, 2021; Liljestrand, 2021). When tensions appear, preschool teachers can adjust, add, or change the policy in practice based on their professional core values (Hildén, Löfdahl Hultman, & Ribaeus, 2021). This indicates a policy-practice gap and belief-practice gap in relation to curriculum and reforms (Li, Rao, & Tse, 2012; Li, Wang, & Wong, 2011). Moreover, it is difficult for preschool teachers to interpret and implement policies (Sofou & Tsafos, 2010; Yang & Li, 2019) when the policy is complex and open to interpretation based on previous national and local conditions and traditions (Eriksson et al., 2018; Eriksson, 2015; Yang & Li, 2019). Related to this complexity, studies show a limitation of division of labour between preschool teachers and caregivers and that both groups consider themselves to have equal responsibility (Heikka, Halttunen, & Waniganayake, 2018; Steinnes & Haug, 2013). Caregivers promote their own competence and position while downgrading preschool teachers' professional competence and position (Cervantes & Öqvist, 2021).

Preschool teachers' increased responsibility for preschool education and its pedagogical content as outlined in policy documents (National Board of Education, 2010, 2018; SFS, 2010:800) includes a stipulation that preschool teachers became leaders within the work team. However, research has shown that preschool teachers do not consider themselves leaders within the work team (Ranta, Heiskanen, & Kahila, 2023) and rarely identify themselves in positions of leadership; rather, they consider themselves teachers and carers for children, and not as leaders for adults (Heikka, Halttunen, & Waniganayake, 2016; Jónsdóttir, 2012). Aspects that influence preschool teachers' ability to lead relate to their skills, attitudes, and interest in development, and preschool structure and conditions (Heikka, Pitkäniemi, & Hyttinen, 2021; Heikka et al., 2016). It is stated that preschool teachers need to take a leadership role to increase the quality of work in preschool practice (Heikka et al., 2021).

**Theoretical framework**

The focus of this study is on how preschool policy documents have positioned preschool teachers over time and how they play a role in preschool teachers' increased responsibility for preschool education. Positioning theory was applied as an analytic tool to help understand how policy documents over time have impacted preschool teachers' position in relation to caregivers and the work team. Traditionally, positioning theory is used to show how individuals or groups position themselves and others (Harré & Langenhove, 1999; Kayi-Aydar, 2014); positioning involves an agent and a positioned party (Baert, 2012). This article considers policy documents as agents representing how policymakers position individuals or groups, such as preschool teachers, caregivers, and work teams. The authors adopt Baert's (2012, p. 310) definition of positioning: "the process by which certain characteristics are attributed to

an individual or group or some other entity.” According to Baert (2012), Davies and Harré (1999), and Rex and Schiller (2009), this means that the focus is on how policy documents express certain characteristics that define relationships, roles, and expectations. This influences preschool teachers’ ability to act based on rights, duties, and obligations, because preschool teachers can gain or lose the legal ability and right to speak and act (cf. Harré & Slocum, 2003). In the context of this study, policy documents act as narratives in which preschool teachers are positioned in ways that reflect broader social forces and institutional ideologies (Harré & Langenhove, 1999). This becomes important when it influences preschool teachers’ agency, that is, what they are encouraged, permitted, or allowed to do (Rogers & Wetzel, 2013).

## Methodology

In this article, seven policy documents that have governed preschools since 1972 were analyzed: the *Daycare Inquiry* (SOU, 1972:26; SOU, 1972:27), *Pedagogical Program for Preschool 1987* (National Board of Health and Welfare, 1987), *Curriculum for Preschool 1998* (National Board of Education, 1998), *Educational Act* (SFS, 2010:800), *Curriculum for Preschool 1998* (revised 2010) (National Board of Education, 2010), *Curriculum for Preschool 1998* (revised 2016) (National Board of Education, 2016), and *Curriculum for Preschool 2018* (National Board of Education, 2018). They have been implemented as general advice (*Daycare Inquiry* and *Pedagogical Program for Preschool*), law (*Educational Act*), and guidelines (*Curriculum for Preschool*) since the first *Daycare Inquiry* in 1972.

A qualitative analysis was performed to identify patterns and themes in the policy documents and understand how they describe a certain phenomenon (Hodder, 2000; Kohlbacher, 2006; McKee, 2003). This means that the analysis focused on how responsibility and assignment are expressed in the policy documents, which helped to clarify the positioning of preschool teachers over time (cf. Krippendorff, 2018; McTavish & Pirro, 1990). Following the lead of Hsieh and Shannon (2005) and Weber (1990), content analysis was performed. The first step was to systematically read the policy documents and search for specific terms, such as “preschool teacher,” “caregiver,” “work team,” “responsibility,” “leadership,” “staff,” “education,” “teaching,” and “care.” The authors identified that “preschool teacher” was mentioned in some policy documents but not others. The second step was to mark words, phrases, and units that were connected. In the third step, the content and meaning of the phrases and units were sorted into categories that highlighted the context in which those keywords were used. This step helped to identify pattern changes between different policy documents regarding responsibility and assignments for preschool teachers, caregivers, and work teams. Finally, a theoretical perspective and empirical patterns were used to categorize the patterns into two abstract themes (Stemler, 2001) using positioning theory (cf. Bryman, 2004; Creswell, 2007): positioning preschool teachers as invisible and positioning preschool teachers as visible.

## Results

Two themes emerged from the policy documents’ positioning of preschool teachers over time. The first, *positioning preschool teachers as invisible*, was built on the *Daycare*

*Inquiry* (1972), *Pedagogical Program for Preschool 1987*, and *Curriculum for Preschool 1998*. The second, *positioning preschool teachers as visible*, was built on the *Curriculum for Preschool 1998* (revised 2010), *Educational Act, Curriculum for Preschool 1998* (revised 2016), and *Curriculum for Preschool 2018*.

## **Positioning preschool teachers as invisible**

### **Daycare inquiry 1972**

The *Daycare Inquiry* challenged the previous strict division of responsibilities, in which preschool teachers managed pedagogy and caregivers handled caregiving. Thus, positional moves were identified from a more hierarchical structure between preschool teachers and caregivers toward equal responsibilities and a fair distribution of work tasks. A collaborative work team model was stipulated to be central, with joint responsibility between the occupational categories. This positional move downgraded preschool teachers' profession, education, and competence; in other words, they became invisible. Instead, the *Daycare Inquiry* positions preschool teachers and caregivers as equal when emphasizing that all staff should contribute to pedagogical work, with tasks allocated based on individual strengths. Preschool teachers' formal education and deeper knowledge can help the staff in their work of child development; however, this education and knowledge is equated with caregivers' lengthy experience. The *Daycare Inquiry* stipulates:

Preschool teachers, with their extended education and deeper knowledge, can bring new perspectives to team discussions on pedagogical issues, which over time helps all staff develop a dynamic view of child development and its conditions. However, this should not be viewed categorically. Gaps in theoretical education are often compensated in valuable ways by insights gained from extensive work experience and important personal qualities. (SOU, 1972:26, p. 134)

This positioning of preschool teachers' education as equal to caregivers' experience and personal qualities can be viewed as upgrading caregivers' position. Several factors are considered in the distribution of work tasks within a cohesive work team: formal education, practical experience, specific abilities, individual interests, and skills. The *Daycare Inquiry* stipulates the following:

An important function of the work team is to achieve a division of labor that focuses on each member's specific abilities. Within the team, efforts are made to identify staffs' interests and skills that can benefit the activities. Following this, task distribution can take place. (SOU, 1972:27, pp. 49–50)

This emphasis on a work team, where preschool teachers and caregivers work side by side with children in practice and distribute tasks among themselves with joint planning, decision-making, and shared responsibilities, is expected to enhance both workplace satisfaction and the quality of work.

### **Pedagogical program for preschool 1987**

The concept of a work team was reinforced in a pedagogical program for preschool.

The two occupational categories of preschool teacher and caregiver in the *Daycare Inquiry* were replaced in the *Pedagogical Program for Preschool* with the sampling name “staff.” This meant that preschool teachers and caregivers were not mentioned explicitly, and the work team was still emphasized as a central form of collaboration where staff members’ experiences and perspectives were valued equally. The equal positioning of preschool teachers and caregivers continues to be prevalent, and the positioning of preschool teachers as invisible is reinforced when the occupational category is not defined, as shown in the following excerpt from the *Pedagogical Program for Preschool*:

Preschool staff should collaborate in teams. This means that the pedagogical work intentionally utilizes the resources available within the staff group, aiming to make the most of each individual’s personal experiences and special interests. Work tasks and responsibilities should be allocated based on competence, ability, and interest. (National Board of Health and Welfare, 1987, p. 52)

The pedagogical program for preschools was designed to provide general advice on preschool pedagogical practice by focusing on pedagogical goals, aiming to create a unified pedagogical foundation for all preschools in Sweden, regardless of staff titles or professional backgrounds. By not specifying occupational categories, a shared responsibility for pedagogical goals is reinforced. The emphasis on the work team and collaboration among all staff underscores that pedagogical work tasks are shared within the team, with each individual staff member contributing to the children’s development and learning. This approach promotes an inclusive view in which everyone holds a shared responsibility for pedagogy, and formal higher education and upper secondary school education can be viewed as equal. The *Pedagogical Program for Preschool* stipulates:

The preschool’s activities should be led by staff educated in preschool pedagogy. The knowledge and experience of the staff are the preschool’s most valuable assets. They should be able to consciously select content and apply methods that promote learning and development for all children in the group. (National Board of Health and Welfare, 1987, p. 52)

The pedagogical program allows for flexibility in how work tasks and responsibilities are distributed within the work team. It enables preschools to tailor the division of labour based on individual staff members’ competence, experience, and interest. By positioning preschool teachers and caregivers as equal regarding work tasks and responsibilities, the intent can be viewed as encouraging cooperation within work teams and reducing potential conflicts.

### **Curriculum for preschool 1998**

The curriculum for preschool was the first national curriculum introduced in Sweden and organized the goals of preschool education into five categories: 1) norms and values, 2) development and learning, 3) children’s influence, 4) preschool and home, 5) collaboration with preschool class, school, and after school club. The focus is on how preschool gives children the opportunity to develop and learn. Similarly to the

*Pedagogical Program for Preschool*, preschool teacher as a profession is not mentioned. The importance of the work team is reinforced and replaces the prior focus on staff by stipulating that “preschool shall,” “everyone who works in the preschool shall,” and “the work team shall.” The curriculum stipulates:

Guidelines for preschool staff partly state that the responsibility rest on everyone who works in the preschool, partly the responsibility the work team has that the work focus on the goal in the curriculum. (National Board of Education, 1998, p. 7)

The focus on the work team and its responsibility to fulfill the preschool mission remains. The preschool teacher as a profession continues to be positioned as invisible, and focus is still on an equal and fair distribution of tasks and responsibilities between preschool teachers and caregivers. The curriculum states that the work team is responsible for the work in preschool and for focusing on the goals in the curriculum.

### ***Positioning preschool teachers as visible***

#### **The Educational Act**

In 2010, the *Educational Act* introduced teaching as a concept in preschool and outlined the preschool teacher’s responsibility to lead teaching. The *Educational Act* stipulates that teaching is a “goal-orientated processes that, under the lead of teachers or preschool teachers, aim to development and learning through the acquisition and development of knowledge and values” (SFS, 2010:800, §3). In January 2023, this was replaced with teaching as a “processes led by teachers or preschool teachers, in lessons or other learning opportunities, toward objectives set out in regulations and other constitutions related to this act aimed at development and learning through the acquisition and development of knowledge and values by children or pupils” (SFS 2010:800, §3). The *Educational Act* positions preschool teachers as responsible for leading teaching and requires preschool teachers to hold a teaching certificate: “Only individuals with certification as a teacher or preschool teacher, and who are qualified for specific teaching, are permitted to conduct that teaching” (SFS, 2010:800, §13). This marks a shift in which the preschool teacher position is upgraded to be superior over the work team, as well as a shift from equal responsibility between preschool teachers and caregivers to a more hierarchical structure. At the same time, it is stipulated that other staff with relevant knowledge or experience can be engaged in teaching: “In addition to the teachers or preschool teachers referred to in §13, other personnel with relevant education or experience that supports the development and learning of students or children may also be involved in teaching in ... preschools” (SFS, 2010:800, §14). This stipulation may be interpreted as meaning other staff in the work team, such as caregivers with experience without a teacher certificate, are permitted to teach, which may affect the position of preschool teachers as superior in preschool practice.

#### **Curriculum for preschool 1998 (revised 2010)**

The increased responsibility of preschool teachers in the *Educational Act* influenced the 2010 revision of the *Curriculum for Preschool*. However, the concept of teaching and, consequently, preschool teachers’ responsibility for teaching are not included

in the revised curriculum. This can be viewed as a misalignment between the two policy documents. Rather, a division of labour is stated between preschool teachers and the work team in relation to the goal areas, which, in the revised curriculum, has been expanded with two more goal areas: 1) follow-up, evaluation, and development, and 2) head of preschool's responsibility. The division of labour is stipulated as "preschool teachers' responsibility" and "the work team shall." The curriculum expresses the following:

The guidelines for the staff in the preschool specify not only the responsibility of preschool teachers to ensure that work is carried out in accordance with the goals in the curriculum, but also the responsibility that each and everyone in the work team has in the preschool. (National Board of Education, 2010, p. 8)

The preschool teacher position is upgraded when preschool teachers are positioned as superior to the work team. However, despite a clear division of labour and hierarchical structure that positions preschool teachers as having more responsibility, the work team is still considered important for preschool education quality. The work team will collaborate and support the pedagogical work, though without the same formal responsibility as preschool teachers.

However, this upgrade of preschool teachers' position in relation to the work team can be open to alternative interpretations and affect the division of labour in practice. An example is preschool teachers' responsibility for systematic quality work and what the work team should do. The following two quotes from the revised curriculum illustrate this:

The preschool teacher is responsible for ensuring that each child's learning and development is regularly and systematically documented, followed-up, and analyzed so that it is possible to evaluate how preschool provides opportunities for children to develop and learn in accordance with the goals and intentions of the curriculum. (National Board of Education, 2010, p. 14)

The work team shall regularly and systematically document, follow-up, and analyze each child's learning and development, as well as evaluate how the preschool provides the child with opportunities for learning and development in accordance with the goals and intentions of the curriculum'. (National Board of Education, 2010, p. 15)

This can be interpreted as preschool teachers and the work team having the same duties even if the preschool teacher is stated as being responsible. Even if a division of labour is stated, it is unclear what that labour consists of, which leads to preschool teachers and the work team being viewed as equal and doing the same work tasks. Therefore, the curriculum can be interpreted to mean preschool teachers are in a position of authority, but in practice they can be positioned as equal to the work team.

In 2016, the *Curriculum for Preschool* was further revised, but in relation to preschool teachers' responsibility it only clarified preschool teachers' responsibility for

collaborating with other school forms and supporting the transition to primary school, with particular attention on children with special needs. Preschool teachers should ensure continuity and progression in children's learning by informing teachers in primary school about preschool educational content (National Board of Education, 2016).

### Curriculum for preschool 2018

In 2018, a new regulation was implemented, and the *Curriculum for Preschool 2018* was introduced (National Board of Education, 2018). The main changes in the curriculum are clearer and include more comprehensive statements regarding the preschool teacher's role and responsibilities in relation to, for example, gender equality, digitalization, and teaching. The main changes regarding preschool teachers' roles and responsibilities concern teaching. For the first time, teaching is mentioned as a concept in preschool education, and preschool teachers' responsibility for teaching is now in line with the *Educational Act* (SFS, 2010:800). In the curriculum's first chapter, the mission of preschool and a clarification of preschool teachers' responsibility for teaching and the role of the work team are stated as follows:

Preschool teachers should be responsible for the pedagogical content of teaching and for the goal-oriented work to promote development and learning in children. Preschool teachers therefore have a special responsibility in the education, which should be jointly provided by the work team. In teaching, other members of the work team, e.g., caregivers, also participate in teaching to promote children's development and learning. (National Board of Education, 2018, p. 7)

Preschool teachers' positions are strengthened when their responsibility for educational content is clarified. The work team is still important; education should be jointly provided by the work team, and caregivers are mentioned as an occupation category in relation to educational content for the first time since the *Daycare Inquiry*. Caregivers are stipulated as participants in teaching, and preschool teachers are positioned as superior with an overarching responsibility. This positioning is further clarified in a new goal area, "preschool teachers' responsibility for teaching," the first time in a curriculum that preschool teacher is mentioned in a goal area heading. Giving the preschool teacher a goal area instead of stipulating guidelines for the preschool teacher and work team can be viewed as further upgrading preschool teachers' position. Under this goal area, preschool teachers' special responsibility for teaching is stipulated:

Teaching in the preschool should take place under the lead of preschool teachers and promote the children's development and learning through the acquisition and development of knowledge and values. Preschool teachers should lead the goal-oriented processes and assume responsibility in teaching. (National Board of Education, 2018, p. 19)

This goal area is directed to only preschool teachers. Preschool teachers are not only responsible but also positioned as leaders for both the work team and children in preschool education.

## Discussion

The aim of this article was to analyze how policy documents for preschool have, over time, positioned preschool teachers and how they play a role in preschool teachers' possibilities to take increased responsibility for preschool education. The results show that policy documents positioned preschool teachers as invisible between 1972 and 2010 by downgrading their position, and as visible from 2010 onward by upgrading their position. These positionings have influenced preschool teachers' responsibilities, where, in line with Harré and Slocum (2003), their rights, duties, and obligations are negotiated and influence their opportunity to act. This study shows that preschool teachers' visibility in policy is not only a matter of naming professional roles but also concerns how responsibilities and leadership are framed and distributed. When preschool teachers are made visible in policy, it signals a recognition of their professional expertise and opens up possibilities for agency, leadership, and accountability. Conversely, when their role is left undefined or merged with broader staff categories, it contributes to professional invisibility and limits their capacity to act. Understanding visibility in this way helps clarify how policy shapes preschool teachers' profession and their opportunity to act.

Preschool teachers' superior position over caregivers was illuminated in the *Daycare Inquiry 1972*, which implemented a collaborative work-team model in which preschool teachers and caregivers shared responsibilities and assignments. This flat organizational structure, which positions preschool teachers as invisible by downgrading their position as equal to caregivers, was reinforced in the *Pedagogical Program for Preschool 1987* and *Curriculum for Preschool 1998*. Despite the fact that the pedagogical program for preschool aims to strengthen and clarify the pedagogical role of preschool and that the *Curriculum for Preschool 1998* made a shift toward children's learning and development, they both avoid a definition of preschool teachers' role in pedagogical work. According to Harré and Slocum (2003), preschool teachers were given 1) the right to contribute equally with caregivers in work teams for pedagogical work; 2) duties of shared responsibilities in planning, decision-making, and implementing activities in pedagogical work; and 3) obligations to collaborate with shared responsibility at the expense of preschool teachers' professional autonomy.

A key turning point occurred in 2010 with the introduction of teaching as a concept in preschool and assigning preschool teachers the responsibility for teaching in the *Educational Act* (SFS, 2010:800) as well as for the educational content in the *Curriculum for Preschool 1998* (revised 2010), which led to a positional move and a reposition of preschool teachers' roles and profession. This was also reinforced in the *Curriculum for Preschool 2018*, which introduced teaching and preschool teachers' responsibility for teaching in the curriculum. This upgrade of preschool teachers' position to visible reflects, according to Rogers and Wetzel (2013), a reclaiming of agency and profession, which shapes their possibility to act. This position upgrade is also a way to reclaim a hierarchical structure through a division of labour between preschool teachers and the work team regarding responsibilities, which reinforces preschool teachers' superior role as leaders of pedagogical content in preschool education. According to Harré and Slocum (2003), preschool teachers were given: 1) rights in the form of responsibility for the pedagogical content and to make peda-

gological decisions; 2) duties, for example, leading teaching and ensuring systematic quality by documenting, following up, and evaluating the quality of the education in preschool; and 3) an obligation to collaborate with the work team.

This study adds new knowledge and understanding of why preschool teachers face challenges when taking increased responsibility for preschool education. The results show that policy plays a pivotal role in preschool teachers' possibilities to take increased responsibility for preschool education. The positional moves in the policy documents demonstrate how policy serves as a mechanism and has the power to reshape the profession and redistribute power within preschools. The shift in rights, duties, and obligations expands our understanding of why challenges exist today among preschool teachers and principals regarding repositioning in line with changes in policy documents (Cervantes & Öqvist, 2021; Öqvist & Cervantes, 2024; Eriksson, 2014; Gustafsson & Mellgren, 2008; Karila & Kinos, 2012; Ratcliff et al., 2011; Sofou & Tsafos, 2010; Steinnes & Haug, 2013; Yang & Li, 2019) and for preschool teachers to identify themselves as leaders for *both* children and adults (Cervantes & Öqvist, 2021; Heikka et al., 2016; Jónsdóttir, 2012). Building on Hopmann (2013), it is arguable that the previous tradition of a flat organizational structure and culture with a marginalized preschool teacher profession, in which tasks and responsibilities were distributed based on fairness rather than formal education, knowledge, and competence, influenced preschool education at the practical level more than policy. According to Li et al. (2012) and Li et al. (2011), a gap is created between policy–practice and belief–practice, and the belief–practice relationship is stronger. One important factor that can explain this gap is ambiguity in the policies. At the same time preschool teachers are stipulated as responsible for leading the pedagogical content in preschool education where teaching is included, there are overlapping responsibilities with the work team, which raises the possibility of contested positions where both preschool teachers and caregivers reinterpret their roles and responsibilities.

## Conclusion

In summary, policies' positioning of preschool teachers over time varies. It goes from a downgrading position (1972–2010), with a loss of agency and profession, to an upgrading position (2010–the present), with renewed agency and profession as leaders as well as a superior position and responsibilities for pedagogical content in preschool education. This study links policy to preschool teachers' profession, showing that policy either marginalizes or empowers preschool teachers with insights into the broader implications of policy decisions. Policy plays a crucial role in preschool teachers' possibilities to take increased responsibility for preschool education when it serves as a mechanism and has the power to reshape responsibilities and redistribute power within preschools. For policymakers, it is necessary to overcome ambiguities in policy when overlapping responsibilities between preschool teachers and the work team appear, which enables opportunities for contested positions where both preschool teachers and caregivers can reinterpret their roles and responsibilities. This is also important for preschool teacher education when educating and preparing students for their upcoming profession; policy influences preschool

teachers' practice, agency, and professional autonomy. Preschool education is considered important for improving children's learning and development and supporting and preparing them for success in their future education. To achieve this, it is important for children to receive an equal education in which preschool teachers take increased responsibility for preschool education. Otherwise, we risk limiting children's opportunities for development and learning.

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