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## Eliciting concepts in the field of extended education. A Swedish provoke

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# Eliciting Concepts in the Field of Extended Education – A Swedish Provoke

*Anna Klerfelt & Anna-Lena Ljusberg*

**Abstract:** The aim of this article is to contribute to the discussion concerning the concepts used in the field of extended education by scrutinising different concepts that can contribute to research and guard the specific educational attitude of extended education as viewed from a Swedish perspective. The discussion will be based on a review of concepts used in both national and international research, as well as those formulated in Swedish policy documents and traditionally used in Swedish school-age educare activity. Defining extended education as a social practice that aims at meaning making based on experiences from everyday life will be an important theoretical starting point to which the discussed concepts will be related. The significance of taking a point of departure in children's perspectives is central in the article. Finally, some newly created concepts will be suggested as significant for the development of extended education.

**Keywords:** extended education, Swedish concepts, theories, values

## Introduction

There is a variety of concepts used in the field of extended education, due to different societal expectations and dissimilar underlying theoretical and philosophical starting points. To be able to construct a worldwide critical discussion among researchers, teachers, and policymakers with the purpose of developing this area of research and field of knowledge, definitions of different concepts and an endeavour to develop new concepts or modernise the use of traditional ones are needed. The world is created by language and language is performative (Butler, 1999). Language structures and explains the world and forces people to act. Concepts can quickly and efficiently give a basic and fundamental understanding of contexts and conditions, and can mediate meaning. However, the concepts can have a contrary effect if they are vague and equivocal. In such cases they might rather shape confusion and ambiguity than communication and understanding. Several concepts within the Swedish field of extended education, that is, school-age educare, suffer from flaws. Some of them originate from the beginning of the twentieth century when the activity of school-age educare was characterised by features other than that which characterises the activity today. At that time school-age educare were governed by the National Board of Health and Welfare. The activity has then been ex-

posed to several extensive reconstructions from within political and societal changes which lead to that the responsibility for the activity was transferred to the Ministry of Education 1998. The transfer of school-age educare from the social sector to the education sector entailed a change in language, but when using Swedish formulations, or Swedish concepts translated into English, deficiencies appear. Among the most significant deficiencies are that some formulations do not always express the changes in the activity and that outdated concepts are not always replaced, but can remain both in the policy documents and in spoken language. The aim of this article is to contribute to the discussion about those concepts used internationally in the field of extended education by scrutinizing different Swedish concepts. The chosen concepts are cornerstones to understand the purposes and the significance of school-age educare in Sweden. Our intention is to contribute to scientific clarification and to guard the specific educational attitude that characterises extended education as viewed from a Swedish perspective. Taking a specific perspective has to do with orientation, as well as with gaze and position, with how to regard something and where to stand. It can also mean theory, visual angle, point or direction from which something is seen or depicted (Ljusberg, 2009, p.10). In this article we with a Swedish perspective mean that we analyze the phenomenon “concepts in the field of Extended Education” from a particular position as Swedish researchers, discussing and scrutinizing concepts used in this activity with traditions that comprises experiences from more than one hundred years. There is a need, both in Sweden and in other countries, to find or create new concepts that can in a more complete way create understanding concerning the activity performed today. We start a review of concepts by providing examples of Swedish school-age educare as described and regulated in Swedish policy documents and problematise that from without theoretical and activity based perspectives.

## Swedish school-age educare as depicted in policy documents

Swedish school-age educare emanates from values and is a part of the public school system. The school-age educare and the school are based on democratic foundations and the education should impact and establish respect for human rights and the fundamental values on which Swedish society is based. Equality and solidarity, understanding and compassion for others are highly emphasised. The values are described in the Education Act (SFS 2010:800) and section 1 and 2 in the curriculum (The Swedish National Agency for Education<sup>1</sup>, 2011, rev. 2018). An important task for the school-age educare is to mediate these values. A consequence of this starting point is that Swedish school-age educare is highly estimated and recognized. But at the same time somewhat taken for granted, since there is no need to prove its existence which also might be a reason for the low interest from the society to devote funding for research directed towards the field of school-age educare.

School-age educare has a section of its own in the curriculum (SNAE, 2011, rev. 2018, section 4, pp. 23-26), which clarifies the purpose and core content of the educational programmes in school-age educare. This section begins by declaring a holistic approach to the activity of school-age educare, by formulating that the concept of “...the educational programme should be given a broad interpretation in school-age educare, where care, develop-

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1 The abbreviation SNAE will be used in the text to come.

ment and teaching constitute a whole” (p. 23). The formulation *broad* is worth noting, and emphasises that the activity shall be seen as different in school-age educare compared to how it is viewed in compulsory school.

The aim of the educational programme is to:

...stimulate pupils' development and learning, as well as offer the pupils meaningful leisure time. This should be done through the educational programme being based on the pupil's needs, interests and experiences, while ensuring that the pupils are continuously challenged, by inspiring them to make new discoveries. The educational programme should introduce pupils to a variety of ways of working and expressing themselves, and offer them learning environments that integrate childcare and learning. (SNAE, 2011, rev. 2018, p. 23)

As we can see, the child's perspective is directly highlighted in this introductory paragraph, and further on, all policy documents governing the Swedish school and school-age educare, like the Education Act (SFS 2010:800) and its interpretations (SNAE, 2014), take their point of departure in children's perspective. The curriculum for school-age educare states that the programme has to take its starting point in pupils' needs, interests and experiences (p. 23). That means that the practice in school-age educare has to take the starting point in the child perspective. The concept child perspective used in research concerns the child and the child's world as seen from the outside while the concept children's perspective means that the children themselves have made their contribution (Ljusberg, 2009). When it comes to the school-age educare, learning from a child's perspective not only means that the teachers, according to the curriculum, must listen to the children, but that they must also see children as competent actors (James, 2011; Mayall, 2002) in their own lives. This implies that the teacher must also translate the aims of the curriculum into practical situated action and plan on this basis.

Another fundamental task of the school and the school-age educare is to “encourage all pupils to discover their own uniqueness as individuals and thereby be able to participate in the life of society by giving of their best in responsible freedom” (SNAE, 2011, rev. 2018, p. 5). The children are encouraged to learn to understand each other by taking each other's perspectives, and in the common part of the curriculum, that regulate both school and school-age educare, we can read that the school and the school-age educare, is a social and cultural meeting place (p. 5). The pupils shall “broaden their understanding of different ways of thinking and being” (p. 23).

Educating democratic citizens is also a fundamental traditional value in the educational programme, and this is thus explicitly expressed in the curriculum. The children are encouraged to “develop familiarity with democratic principles, working methods and processes through participation, exercising influence and take responsibility in the activities” (SNAE, 2011, rev. 2018, p. 24). In the curriculum, it is explicitly expressed that children's rights are to be considered a part of the activity's content (p. 26), in line with the Convention of the Child (UNICEF, 1989). Swedish school-age educare is based in children's well-being and their possibilities for meaningful leisure and recreation, in care, education, and meaning making. The relation that connects care and education is explicitly marked out in the curriculum (p. 23). It is a question of both physical care and a question of the child's right to attention, wellbeing and concern, as well as participation and democratic rights. School-age educare can never exclude care when it comes to education.

The curriculum also formulates that pupils in school-age educare shall be encouraged to try out and develop different modes of expression and experience feelings and moods.

Drama, rhythm, dance, music and creativity in art, writing and design should all form part of the activity.

This short description of the goals in the curriculum for Swedish school-age educare also includes examples of some concepts used in the curriculum, such as when stating the values grounding the activity. The Swedish curriculum for the compulsory school, the preschool class and school-age educare (SNAE, 2011, rev. 2018) is an important document for revealing the concepts used on an official policy level. School-age educare is implemented throughout the country, and nearly all children aged six to nine (SNAE, 2018) attend this activity. Having a comprehensively implemented extended education gives Sweden, and to some extent the other Nordic countries as well, a special position from an international point of view. Having one curriculum that steers all school-age educare centres makes the curriculum a unifying tool that can support equality throughout the country (Klerfelt & Stecher, 2018).

## Useful concepts – or concepts in use

Earlier, the designation *after-school centre*, *leisure-time centre* and/or *recreation centre* were used to translate the Swedish designation *fritidshem* into English. However, these translations all have shortcomings. School-age educare in Sweden is carried out before, during and after the school day, which make the designation *after-school centre* obsolete. As we understand the English word *leisure*, it is more connected with rest and lazing around, and the activity in Swedish school-age educare is absolutely not just lazing around, which makes the designation *leisure-time centre* unsuitable. The designation *recreation centre* is interesting, as it refers to the question of having recreation at the school-age educare centre, but it far from covers the variety of activities offered in the centres that fulfil the complexity of the multiplex goals stipulated in the curriculum. The designation *school-age educare* (launched by Klerfelt & Rohlin, 2012) has come increasingly into use. The strength in that designation is that it points out the age range the activity addresses and the relation between education and care. As mentioned in the earlier paragraph, the Swedish National Agency for Education has adopted this designation in their newly launched English Translation of the Swedish Curriculum (SNAE, 2011, rev. 2018).

The transition of the school-age educare centre from *the social pedagogical arena* to *the educational arena* (Rohlin, 2001, 2012) has entailed a schoolification (Andersson, 2013) of the programme that also has been visible in the changed designations that name the participants, the content and the activity. Children participating in school-age educare centres are now called *pupils* in the governing documents. The concept ‘pupil’ is in Swedish translated to ‘elev’ borrowed from the French ‘élève’ and inherited from the traditional school-context. The concept is used to signify a person that receives knowledge, which in an educational context theoretically tunes toward the conduit metaphor (Reddy, 1979) and a passive take over of knowledge mediated by the teacher. Furthermore, the concept *learning* is used, and the activity is called *educational programme*, while researchers and teachers at school-age educare centres often still explain that children are viewed as participants with agency and as subjects, not merely an objectified school-pupil, which is in line with the perceptions about viewing children as ‘beings’ or ‘becomings’. Researchers as James and Prout (1997) and



Qvortrup (1994) described in the late 90's the concept of 'human becoming' and 'human being' as a distinction between the traditional developmental psychological perspective of children and childhood and a more relational way. The traditional developmental psychological way of looking at children is described as 'human becoming' where children are considered more imperfect than adults and childhood becomes a shortcoming, something to be improved through development and socialization. From the more relational perspective, children are seen as 'human being' in which children are seen as fellow human beings with intentions and ability to make sense, even though they do not have an adult's conceptual device, or the same bodily and verbal ability (James & Prout, 1997; Qvortrup, 1994).

Discussing school-age educare when termed as a didactic arena is under debate in Sweden, with reference to the alternative approach to life and learning that characterise the content in the programme (Klerfelt & Stecher, 2018). An evaluation made by the Swedish Agency for Education 2018 (p. 42) shows that some teachers towards work in school-age educare centres criticize concepts used in the part of the curriculum regulating the school-age educare centres (SNAE, 2011, rev. 2018) for signalling more of a traditional school culture than the school-age educare culture. There is a worry that the school-age educare with a tradition of emphasising care in combination with education will weaken and teaching and supervision increase (Andersson, 2014; Lager, 2015). There is also a worry that the teacher profession towards work in school-age educare will gradually more and more be dominated by the school tradition and lose characteristic features from the school-age educare tradition (Klerfelt, 2017a; Klerfelt & Stecher, 2018; Ljusberg & Holmberg, 2019). The school-age educare's point of departure in the child's perspective also argues to counteract the ongoing process of schoolification.

## Interpretation of the mission of complement and compensate

The concepts complement and compensate are central to the curriculum when the mission of school-age educare is described. The concept *complement* targets how both educational activities, school-age educare and compulsory school shall cooperate, and the concept *compensation* concerns children's different and unequal access to resources.

### Complement

The curriculum stipulates that "[T]he educational programme, in school-age educare, complements preschool and compulsory school, to a greater degree, by having learning be situationally governed, experience-based and group oriented, as well as being based on the pupils' needs, interests and initiative" (SNAE, 2011, rev. 2018, p. 23). The formulation in the citation points out that the learning in both preschool/school and school-age educare shall be situationally governed, experience-based and group oriented, as well as based on the pupils' needs, interests and initiative. However, and this is important, the Swedish National Agency of Education insists, when using the reinforcing adjective *to a greater degree*, that the activity that occurs in school-age educare shall have additional features besides educational practices. This formulation highlights that the activity shall add and supply the educational programmes in compulsory school and preschool class. How school-age educare

shall design their activities to reach this goal for this supplementary activity is then described in section four of the curriculum, directly regulating the programme in school-age educare. Having confidence that school-age educare can provide complementation indicates a recognition of an alternative way to view knowledge and how learning is supposed to take place in school-age educare. It is this alternative way of perceiving education that school-age educare is entrusted with, which contributes to fulfilling the extension of the school-day for children, both when it comes to an extension in time and when it comes to an extension in educational attitude. That there is a reciprocity when it comes to the interchange between the different educational practices in preschool class, compulsory school and school-age educare, is also pointed out in the curriculum by the formulation, “[R]eciprocal exchange between the pedagogical approaches of the preschool class, the school and school-age educare can together help to enrich the pupils’ development and learning” (SNAE, 2011, rev. 2018, p. 9). In other parts of the curriculum, the formulations simply express that it is school-age educare that shall contribute to preschool class and compulsory school. In our opinion, the formulations in the curriculum could clarify and emphasise the mutuality in the reciprocity of this complement of the activity orchestrated by preschool class, compulsory school, and school-age educare (Klerfelt, 2017b). We assume that the somewhat sided formulation originated in earlier versions of the curriculum, which stipulated that school-age educare should complete the home (Ministry of Education and Research, 1994). The formulation that school-age educare shall complete preschool and school instead of the home has probably, just without reflection, been repeated when the curriculum was changed from that school-age educare shall complete preschool and school instead of the home.

## Compensation

When it comes to the concept of *compensation*, this concept indicates school-age educare’s strong foundation in values. The intention, formulated in the Education Act (SFS 2010: 800), is that all children shall reach their utmost potential. The reality is that children grow up dependent on different living conditions. School-age educare is here in the policy documents depicted as a tool for affording children experiences that are not available in other environments where they already participate. Due to the children’s different experiences, it is a challenge for teachers in school-age educare centres to design their activity in different ways in order to direct different activities towards certain groups or individuals and thereby fulfil the goal of compensation. It concerns a whole range of the assignment’s different aspects, for instance, the experience of visiting museums, sporting, expressing themselves in arts and feeling safe. We also want to highlight that when it comes to compensation it is important to be aware of what different theories are in use. First, you need to base the reflection in if you perceive different childhoods conditions like problems or challenges. Second, it is important to acknowledge whether you see the question of different childhood conditions as a problem in the child or as a challenge to the education. In research where one takes an individual perspective, the problem is usually placed in the child, whereas research that takes a more relational perspective perceived it as a challenge placed in the encounter between children and staff in a particular context, such as school-age educare (Ljusberg, 2009; Skidmore, 2004). Our interpretation is that the legislation is clear and points to the fact that the teacher team has to see compensation as an educational challenge. In line with Wenger (1998), we under-

stand school-age educare as created by its participants. How children and childhood are defined is important for the demands, care and treatment that they receive and give.

## Meaning making

If the concepts *learning* and *education* can be perceived as concepts based in a traditional school discourse, perhaps the concept *meaning making* might help broaden an educational discourse so that it also incorporates the child's perspective. The concept meaning making carries in itself a criticism of the division of individual human beings into separate parts, where mind, sense and emotion are kept apart (Wenger, 1998). School-age educare teachers take the opposite stance and discuss the importance of seeing the whole child and keeping mind, sense and emotion together (Klerfelt, 2017a). Wenger (1998) describes the making of meaning as taking place in everyday settings and in authentic situations. Meaning making occurs in social practices where human beings, by sharing resources, organise and coordinate their actions, mutual relations and interpretations of the world (Wenger, 1998, p. 13). Social practice includes language, tools, documents, pictures, symbols, well-defined roles and procedures, rules and contracts, which different practices use and make visible for different purposes. Wenger emphasises that a practice is produced by its participants through a constant and ongoing negotiation of meaning. Lave (1993) maintains that the human being appropriates meaning by learning to handle activities where the meaning functions. In an interactive perspective, focus for the cognitive processes is thereby transferred to social practice.

Viewed from a situated perspective (Lave & Wenger, 1991), the situation not only constitutes a context for, but are a part of the knowledge where concepts are tools which are appropriated by employment and making of meaning is a result of social negotiation. In that way, activity, concepts and culture become mutually dependent and come into expression as changed learning in a social practice. Lave (1993) emphasises that meaning is not created by individual intentions, but is "...mutually constituted in relations between activity systems and persons acting, and has a relational character" (Lave, 1993, p. 18).

The concept meaning making is used to signify children's strive to understand the world around them and create coherence in their life. School-age educare can be perceived as an educational practice where children create meaning from within experiences from their everyday lives. Knowledge is commonly created by children and teachers together by participation in this practice. The concept meaning making is used to designate this process (Klerfelt, 2007; Ljusberg, 2011a, 2011b). We perceive the concept meaning making as a superordinate concept that comprises learning and socialisation, and which keeps human and world together. At this point we turn from discussing the concept *meaning making* to another concept under debate, namely a significant activity in the school-age educare educational programme: *play*.

## Play – Free play

One of the most important contents in Swedish school-age educare is *play*, often termed *free play*. However, there is a difference between the concepts *play* and *free play*. *Free play* is of-

ten explained as a voluntary activity where the children themselves decide what to do, with whom, how and where. This does not mean that the children always choose to play, they can for example choose to read a book (see e.g. Saar, Löfdahl & Hjalmarsson, 2012). Haglund (2015) describes “free play” as an activity “where the staff take their point of departure based on the children’s perspectives and the enhancement of democratic values and decision-making” (Haglund, 2015, p. 1556). Among all definitions of play we in this article choose to discuss two. One interpretation of play has been play for the sake of play, where the play has its own value (Kane, Ljusberg, & Larsson, 2015; Sutton-Smith, 1997). Another interpretation of play is an instrumental one, where play is used for a purpose, another purpose, such as for learning. This instrumental perspective values play for what children can learn in and through it (Kane, Ljusberg, & Larsson, 2015; Steinsholt, 1999). These two ways to look at play are both represented in the Swedish school-age educare. The authors of this article prefer the first understanding, play for the sake of play. Learning things and doing it throughout life is high on the agenda all over the world. Our point of view is that we are always learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Children learn while they play. We mean that play used for learning is no longer play but is teaching. Teaching may be playful but is still teaching.

## New concepts

There is a need for new concepts to communicate the character of school-age educare and explain and define the activity with respect to other educational practices. Thus we would here like to discuss new possible concepts, and especially the designation *school-age educare*. As already mentioned, this name has strengths; while it avoids words like leisure and recreation, it is a weakness that it lacks connections to meaningful free time with an aspiration to ease and happiness. In one study (Klerfelt, 2017a), teachers in school-age educare centres talk about their work as sharing joy with the children every day and how they use jokes and fun as means for creating a happy atmosphere. They talk about ‘seeing’ the children. They also talk about that they encourage curiosity and creativity, creating an environment in which the children feel happy and secure and challenged to try things they would otherwise not do. This has led to the launching of a new concept concerning with describing the purpose of school-age educare’s inner core of the: *life affirming attitude* (Klerfelt, 2017a; Klerfelt & Ljusberg, 2017). This new concept is possible to connect to Rancière’s (1991) theories about care and love as an educational space between pupils and teachers. Just like the school-age educare teachers in the before mentioned study, Rancière speaks about the importance of the gaze: greeting the children and seeing them with humility and appreciation. He introduces the concept *attention* for involving the child in this educational space, and this concept builds upon an assumption of equality, which we can see is in line with the values underlying school-age educare. Rancière describes being *attentive* as the mode of a human being who verifies equality and who is verified in its turn by other speaking human beings. This is an educational stance that has serious consequences for how to understand not only the individual but also society. Rancière declares that this is “...the moral foundation of the power to know” (1991, p. 57) and we see these theories as a means to clarify the possibilities to educate caring pupils in school-age educare centres.

In this article we have given a critical reflection of certain concepts used in the field of extended education in Sweden as a contribution to a worldwide discussion. We have earlier pointed out the strengths in the designation *school-age educare*, but a weakness is that it lacks intonation to joy and happiness. The inner core of the activity in words of *affirmation to life* is not visible in the concept, nor is *children's perspectives*, the *complementary* and *compensating* aspects, *meaning making* or *play*. We want to point out that there is a need for extending, renewing and developing the concepts, as well as clearing out the outdated ones, to make them into active, efficient tools for clarifying the contribution of the activity to children and society. Consciousness about underlying theories and efficient linguistic tools are needed as support for humans to act in school-age educare in Sweden and to guard the specific educational attitude of extended education.

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