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The Need for Care: A Study of Teachers' Conceptions of Care and Pupils' Needs in a Swedish School-Age Educare Setting

Liza Haglund

Abstract: This paper presents the findings of a study investigating School-Age Educare (SAE) teachers' conceptions of care and care practices and how these conceptions of care and actual practices relate to pupils' needs. The study is based on observations and interviews with two experienced SAE teachers and one young teacher in a Swedish SAE centre, working with pupils between 9–11 years old. The study was undertaken between March 2018 and April 2019, and provides insight into different forms of care and caring practices. The study also shows that pupils nowadays, according to the teachers, have needs that were previously met by their families. The teachers' conceptions of the importance of a well-functioning group and pupils' needs to be able to share their feelings, dreams and worries and to value each other's differences were also salient findings of the study.

Keywords: School-Age Educare, conceptions of care, caring practises, pupils' needs, care ethics

Introduction

School-Age Educare (SAE) in Sweden has its own chapter (4) in the national curriculum policy document for the primary school system, preschool classes and after-school centres (The National Education Act (NAE), 2011/2018). In addition to offering meaningful leisure time, SAE should also "stimulate pupils' development and learning" (p, 23). Previously, after-school centres were mainly places for care and recreation (cf. Calander, 2000). National policy (NAE, 2011/2018) now states that "The concept of an educational programme should be given a broad interpretation in school-age educare, where care, development and teaching constitute a whole" (p. 23). Care, development and teaching can thereby be interpreted as impossible to separate from each other. Policy documents provide evidence of an ideological shift from leisure and care as the main objective of SAE towards a more comprehensive view. The use of the term "teaching", with children seen as "pupils", signals that children are now the objects of education (Pihlgren & Rohlin, 2011). SAE is expected to contribute to the fulfilment of school objectives. Learning is described in the curriculum relating to SAE (NAE, 2011/2018) as situated, activity oriented and based on pupils' needs and interests. It means that SAE activities can serve several aims, being meaningful and fun from the perspective of pupils while at the same time enhancing subject knowledge and skills development. However, this implies a risk that SAE might reproduce the logic of tra-

ditional classrooms and overlook care- and value-based issues (Pihlgren & Rohlin, 2011; Boström, & Augustsson; 2016; Holmberg, 2017). Concern about the increased emphasis on education at the expense of care has also been reflected in worries about the risk of "schoolification" of the pre-school curriculum (Gunnarsdottir, 2014, p. 246).

On the other hand, there is an international trend towards care for children's well-being and socialisation, embodied by programmes such as social and emotional training (SET) (Kimber, 2006). These programmes depart from a risks perspective, accounting for children that have to handle unsound peer relations, bullying, dysfunctional families, crimes and drugs, etcetera (Bartholdsson, Gustafsson-Lundberg, & Hultin, 2014). The sociologist Frank Furedi (2004) identifies this trend, promoted in schools, as anti-intellectual, as it focuses on the development of emotional intelligence. As such, according to Furedi, it forms a part of a wider predominant therapeutic culture. The main caring objective is to raise pupils' self-esteem and help them develop self-control. Care in this sense relates to pupils' psychological lives and relies on the idea that strong self-esteem is the foundation for learning. However, Furedi (2004) argues that despite its focus on self-control, this trend makes us helpless and in need of others and may therefore hamper the development of pupils' autonomy. It has even been argued that caring teachers are the main obstacles preventing pupils' development into democratic citizens (Mc Cuaig, 2011).

Review of the Related Literature

The Inward Turn in Education and the Programme Invasion

At the beginning of 2000, Sweden witnessed an upsurge in different preventive health programmes in schools. This was mainly in response to a call for evidence-based methods and assumption that teachers lacked the relevant competencies to teach the life skills, values and other health-related issues required to meet schools' caring and fostering responsibilities (Bartholdsson & Hultin, 2015; Irisdotter, Aldenmyr, & Olson, 2016). Social and emotional training (SET), referred to above, was for instance designed to prevent drug abuse and criminality and to develop pupils' emotional intelligence (Kimber, 2007). Although the use of programmes such as SET has declined, variations of this programme and others like it remain in schools throughout Sweden (Bartholdsson & Hultin, 2015; Irisdotter, Aldenmyr, & Olson, 2016) and internationally (Wood, 2018), where they influence fostering practices. Some research has reported positive outcomes of the SET programme (Kimber, Skoog, & Sandell, 2013; see also, Durlak, Dymnicki, Weissberg, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). However, this so-called "inward turn in education" (Irisdotter, Aldenmyr, & Olson, 2016) has been criticised (Bartholdsson, Gustafsson-Lundberg, & Hultin 2014). Feelings, in these programmes, are often regarded as biological responses to stimuli. They do not account for other perspectives on feelings, i.e. that they are socially and culturally constructed and therefore can arise and be evaluated and interpreted according to different social contexts (Barthholdsson & Hultin, 2015). Focusing on the management of feelings and self-control also implies to a significant extent that the individual is responsible for failures in life. The source of the problems encountered in life (e.g. unemployment) is found in the individual's emotional domain rather than in structural and political domains.

Wood (2018), in a British study on 400 teachers working with social and emotional learning, found that staff mixed social and emotional aspects of the self with moral issues and the formation of moral attitudes. Norms and values held by the staff were transmitted to students and in this way worked to maintain a hegemonic white culture. According to Wood, such programmes therefore contradict democratic values. Irisdotter, Aldenmyr and Olson (2016) reported that teachers who used different programmes believed that sharing one's innermost feelings and an existential dimension in life were necessary for self-reflection and improved self-control. However, care in these programmes was concerned solely with the psychological well-being of individuals, and lacked a connection to the greater societal good. It is therefore interesting to study conceptions of care and caring practices in order to see which meanings are associated with "care" following criticism of the programme invasion and the new demands formulated for SAE. It has also been argued that care "…is [a] frequently unrecognised and unrewarded aspect of teachers' professional lives" (Hjalmarsson, Löfdahl-Hultman, & Warin, 2017, p. 231).

The Ethics of Care

Nel Noddings, the feminist philosopher and educationalist, can be considered one of the most important thinkers to have written extensively on the ethics of care. From the perspective of the ethics of care, the aim of schools is that children should grow up to be "…competent, caring, loving and lovable people" (Noddings, 1995, p. 5). Care has been defined by Noddings (1996, p. xiii) as "a set of relational practices that foster mutual recognition and realisation, growth, development, protection, empowerment, and human community, culture, and possibility". In other words, care is related to needs in the sense that the care provided by a teacher is based on needs (Noddings, 2005). In the sense intended by Noddings, care is not necessarily related to one kind of need. Pupils may rather have all kinds of academic, psychological or social needs. Everybody, however, needs the experience of caring teachers in a caring environment. Caring teachers try to develop pupils' ability to care for and to empathise with other people. Noddings (1995) has argued that the ethics of care should apply at all levels: teacher–pupil relationships, the school as an institution and education policy. The aim here is not to argue for the implementation of the ethics of care in school and nor is it to provide a full account of Noddings' theory, but rather to present an overview of some distinctions that can provide a framework for the concerns of the present paper.

Noddings (2012) describes the difference between "virtue caring" and "relational caring" (p .53). The former relies on the teacher's conception of and decisions concerning the needs of the pupil, whereas the latter requires mutual reciprocity, and considers the relationship between the carer and the cared for as essential. It means that the teacher listens to the pupils, identifies their needs, and, if possible, meets these needs (Noddings, 2005). If it is not possible to meet the need, the need should be respected and acknowledged. In order for the relationship to be upheld (and the reciprocity condition to be met) the pupil signals that the care has been received, or respected. A crucial distinction is therefore between expressed and inferred needs. The former is what the pupil expresses, and the latter is what the carer/teacher infers that the pupil needs. However, pupils may have needs that are hard to ascertain. For instance, a pupil may feel the need to belong and to succeed in school but his/her fear of failure may prevent him/her from performing adequately. Such pupils may

act as if school does not matter to them. These so-called hidden needs can be expressed in various ways, and interpretation of their expression requires skill on the part of the teacher. They may be vague and hard to differentiate from wants.[1] Pupils may claim that they want something, whereas in reality this claim reflects not an inner real want but rather a trend or popular view. Identifying hidden needs is time consuming. However, doing so is important, as it pertains to pupils' development of care and trust. Some inferred needs are basic and expressed biologically (e.g. the need for food, water and shelter). Some basic needs arise in specific cultures, such as in democracies, where there is a need for the freedom to make life-directing choices. Some inferred needs are general and are "inferred proactively" and included in the curriculum. The present study focuses not on the curriculum but rather teachers' conceptions of needs they infer interactively, so-called specific needs, for example, when an SAE teacher realises that pupils need to learn how to behave in the corridor (i.e. walking rather than running). Pupils may also have overwhelming needs due to sick or absent parents, or being the victims of violence, mockery and feelings of worthlessness and also stomachache and the like (Noddings, 2005). Overwhelming needs cannot be overlooked. "Children who are in pain, afraid, sick, or lost in worry cannot be expected to be interested in arithmetic or grammar" (p. 153). Noddings (2005) also argued that the caring teacher ought to focus more on pupils expressed needs than inferred needs. As such, expressed needs can be related to pupils' rights to participation and influence formulated in the NAE (2011/18), and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Teachers should be ready to change their minds about needs that they have inferred, as they may not be equivalent to real needs. On the other hand, there are cases in which teachers should encourage pupils to reassess their own needs and wants and reflect upon how these relate to their objectives. In addition, teachers should act on needs that they have identified rather than leaving it up to someone else to take action.

The application of Nodding's ethics of care in school contexts has been criticised from several angles (Colnerud, 2006; Mc Cuaig, 2012). For example, teachers' capability to actually relate to all pupils' in the required sense does not seem reasonable given the number of pupils teachers are usually responsible for. Many caring actions may also be performed without the cared-for person ever being aware of them, hence the required condition of reciprocity is not met. It may give rise to unsound power relations, as can be found in families. The ethics of care also fail to acknowledge the complexity of the human mind and that feelings are nested and volatile (cf. Mc Cuaig, 2012). Nevertheless, the ethics of care provide some distinctions that can be useful in analysing teachers' conceptions of care and their actual caring practices.

Research at the SAE

Research on how care is conceptualised and provided by SAE teachers is scarce. However, Hjalmarsson, Löfdahl-Hultman and Warin (2017) have studied how gender and profession relate to conceptions of care. Although care has traditionally been female coded, it was shown that men also thought about care both with regard to everyday practical matters (e.g. getting dressed) and psychological needs (e.g. hugs). They argue for the need to widen the

1 See Noddings (2005) for an explanation of the difference between needs and wants.

concept of "care", allowing it to cover a broader range of teachers' work that traditionally might not be associated with care. In a study by Hjalmarsson and Odenbring (2019), it was showed that SAE teachers supplied proper clothes and specific equipment for outdoor activities, as well as snacks for excursions and afternoon snacks, something which was considered particularly important, as not everyone was served evening meals at home. Andishmand (2017) describes how the staff at one centre, situated in an area with large linguistic diversity and social problems, considered it important to compensate for social inequalities. The social climate was tough and children had problems in their relationships. Notably, the staff expressed the view that it was positive that the pupils were different—it was described as an asset. At the same time the SAE was organised around dichotomies of sex and age, and children were categorised according to binary terms such as boy/girl, Swedish/ not Swedish. Although teachers had the intention of caring for pupils' specific needs they may, according to Andishmand, reproduce structural injustices.

Research studies show an ambivalence with respect to the role of SAE (e.g. Haglund, 2015a; Klerfelt & Haglund, 2014a; Lager, 2019). However, care and pupils' social learning is at the core of SAE. Staff adhering to a social pedagogical discourse may adopt a "distant subject position" (Haglund, 2015a). This means watching pupils from a distance and checking regularly that everybody is fine, that each child has someone to play with and feels safe, on the presumption that pupils learn best from each other and too much interference may affect pupils' abilities to develop social skills. Such strategies are also explained by the number of pupils attending the centres in relation to staff (Haglund, 2015a). Jonsson (2018), in a study of social learning, showed that staff regard safety as the basis for social learning. Due to organisational circumstances, some staff were hindered in planning activities or involving themselves in pedagogical discussions. They therefore saw themselves more as role models. Teachers' interpretations of "participation" and pupils' abilities to make responsible choices rely on conceptions of what skills pupils need to develop (Närvänen & Elvstrand, 2015). Teachers may therefore, in the best interest of pupils, plan activities without involving pupils in the planning (Haglund, 2015b). Holmberg (2017), with reference to Foucault, describes how caring teachers shape pupils' behaviours by way of "pastoral care", "pastoral power" and "mentalised steering techniques" (ibid. p. 32), that is, soft methods. In order for teachers to provide pastoral care they have to have knowledge of the pupils' dreams and fears, and therefore pupils have to take part in confessional practices (cf. Furedi, 2004). In other words, care may be given quite different meanings depending on different conceptions of needs.

Aim and Research Questions

The aim of the present study was to investigate conceptions of care and care practices in a Swedish SAE centre. The study aimed to shed light on how conceptions of care and actual caring practices related to conceptions of pupils' needs.[2] 'Caring practices' is used here in

2 In one sense, it is impossible to delineate conceptions of care from conceptions of development and teaching. The main focus is, however, on care and care practices. It should be noted that one teacher often used "teaching" (sv. undervisa) in dialogues.

order to cover actions that aims at learning certain skills, that is, closer to what might be associated with 'teaching', but covering practices performed for no other reason than for instance, encouraging and comforting.

Methodology

Data

The study was undertaken between March 2018 and April 2019 in an SAE centre here referred to as Logos. Logos is situated in a large city in the middle of Sweden, and was selected for the present study because of its explicit global vison of a better world with responsible caring people.[3] It was assumed that staff would show exceptional care for individual pupils, and that caring practices would also be aimed at developing 'a common good' (Irisdotter, Aldenmyr, & Olson, 2016). Ninety-nine pupils are enrolled at Logos. The school does not use SET or any other programme. However, all teachers in the school receive regular training in non-violent communication (NVC), a communication model that shares some similarities with SET in so far as the individual's psychological needs are in focus. The head of the school selected teachers on the basis that they were the most experienced and also willing to take part. One teacher had a qualification as a sports consultant and a university degree as a teacher in leisure time centres dating from 2013. Another teacher had taken a degree in leisure time pedagogy in 1983. Both had worked since the 1980s in different leisure time centres. At the end of the project a third teacher took part in a recorded group interview. She had an upper secondary school-level qualification in child care education. The data in the study are based on field notes recorded during observations on 15 visits, with each visit lasting between 2.5 and 5.5 h. Observations were "second order participant" (Bjørndal, 2005). When observing circle-time activities, I was given the role of a pupil. Short notes were sometimes taken directly and completed after the observation before leaving school. In addition, three audio-recorded interviews were conducted (see Halldén, Haglund, & Strömdahl, 2007 on interviewing). There was one interview with each of the two experienced teachers (60/40 min each). The interviews took the form of a dialogue in which the teachers were initially asked to describe their work, what they found important with regard to care, and how they planned activities. The third audio-recorded interview (50 min) included the two experienced teachers and the young teacher. In this interview, they were asked to talk about care and the possibility of performing care at the SAE school in relation to the learning of school subject material. The interviews were fully transcribed, except for some parts that were judged to be off track with regard to the research questions in this study.

3 The vision focuses on children's education, in the sense of internal character development, and is based on thinking about sustainability.

Interpretation of Data

The data has been interpreted by departing from a holistic approach to interpretation (extensively described in Haglund, 2017; cf. Halldén, Haglund, & Strömdahl, 2007; Haglund, 2017; Klaassen & Lijnse, 1996). It does not presume that language mirrors thinking.[4] It means that utterances and observed behaviour has been looked upon in terms of actions (Downes, 1998; Halldén, 1999; Davidson, 2001). Interpretations of actions, according to the philosopher Donald Davidsons (2001; cf. Roth, 2009; Rönnström, 2006, 2011), cannot rely on speakers using words in the same sense. Interpretation is in other words always "radical". It implies that "Charity is forced on us" (Davidson, 2001, p. 197), that we have to assume that the speaker is fairly coherent and rational,[5] and that we have to look for that rationality. It relies on us as humans being able to discern the same salient objects and phenomena in a shared environment. Something is salient when it stands out against a more diffuse background (cf. Wertheimer, 1923). Also, speakers' behaviour is salient (Davidson, 2002) and we can, with varying amounts of effort, recognise and interpret people's actions and reactions. For instance, when observing a teacher that sits on the floor with a child in her lap, moving her hand back and forth on the child's back, the bodily movements are, together with other available information (as for instance other children are playing, it is not time for rest), salient enough to interpret it as comforting. Transcriptions of interviews have been performed between visits and then read several times, looking for meanings of care that stand out as salient. Interpretations of the interviews and observations have then been triangulated (Davidson, 2001). Triangulation means briefly, that teachers at a later occasion were asked to confirm or disconfirm specific interpretations of utterances and observations. Teachers also had the possibility to be more specific or correct misunderstandings. Triangulation does not mean the same thing as discussed in research method literature in relation to different kinds of data used in a study (e.g. Cohen & Manion, 1994). It rather refers to the communicative interaction between researcher and teachers at the school with the aim of discussing the meaning of specific propositions in interviews and meanings ascribed to observations (Haglund, 2017). Interpretations and triangulation start already in the interview. For instance, a teacher said at a specific point that it is important "that children are safe". She was asked to explain what she meant by "are safe". She explained that that she meant that they should "feel safe" in terms of being able to explain themselves without being ridiculed.

Results

This study was aimed at investigating conceptions of care and care practices and how these conceptions of care and actual practice related to teachers' conceptions of pupils' needs. In

4 Fontana and Frey (2005) characterized the possibility of drawing conclusions about interviewees' conceptions in a scientific interview as a myth. Others have criticised all research on beliefs, conceptions, etc. that relied on Piagets' (1929) clinical method (Schoultz, Säljö, & Wyndhamn, 2001), arguing that such research rested on a faulty premise of "unobserved entities" (p.109).

5 The principle of charity has been construed in different ways and for different reasons, although Davidson's version (2001) emphasises reference to a shared world (Saka, 2007; Roth, 2009).

the presentation of the results, quotes from the recorded and transcribed interviews are used, although the results are also based on an analysis of the field notes.

Conceptions of Care

Safety

The most salient conception of care shared by the three teachers was care in terms of pupil's feelings of safety. Being safe means that someone is looking after you and comforts you when needed. Everyone should feel that they have been seen and that the staff care about them. Feeling safe also means not being afraid of showing feelings, giving voice to fears and needs, and being allowed to speak one's mind without being ridiculed or harassed. Care is strongly related to the development of positive self-esteem. It also means that one should not need to worry about being unsure of what is happening. For instance, the teachers made sure that they explained what it meant to take part in activities that they had not tried, or were new. Pupils should not feel insecure when trying new things. Psychologically, health, feeling safe and having a good self-image are regarded as the foundation for "everything else" – for learning social skills during SAE and learning ordinary school subjects in school time.

Fairness

Care means recognising pupils' right to be fairly treated. The teachers regularly returned to the importance of knowing how to relate to other people and how to behave in a group. "It is still those who rule and those who choose not to take part. That is what we want to change" (Laura, recorded interview). According to Laura some pupils do not take part in certain group configurations and that is a choice they make. They are not treated as equal participants so they would rather keep themselves at a distance from pupils who rule over other pupils in games or activities. A well-functioning group in which the pupils are nice to each other is desirable, not only because everybody has the right to be fairly treated. It is also because they want to transmit the idea that we need each other, we can help each other and we can learn from each other.

Personal Development

Care means helping pupil develop as people, making use of their full capacity. Laura phrased it concisely, explaining that pupils should leave SAE as 'the best version of themselves' (Laura, recorded interview). In this sense, care means developing pupil's self-esteem. Anne stressed the need to encourage children to show their feelings, 'to let go of the hard surface' (Ann, recorded interview). Ann noticed that it was mainly boys that lacked this kind of competence, and therefore there was a particular need to help them develop it. Laura regarded herself as being better at developing pupils' self-esteem by engaging them in different plays, games and hand crafts rather than through deep conversations. This helped to encourage pupils who would not see themselves making, for instance, a

pearl plate, or attending an excursion. She stressed that pupils needed to try new things and not limit themselves. Pupils could enrich their personalities by taking part in the various activities that the SAE offered. In the citation below, Laura differentiates the core aims of the professionals in SAE and school teaching respectively. "Other teachers in the school focus mainly on knowledge building, whereas we focus on the person. I want to help them to be experts on themselves" (Laura, recorded interview). It appears that SAE staff have to take care of a variety of pupil needs, while school teachers generally take limited responsibility for pupils needs that are not directly related to the school subject they teach.

Caring Practices

The teachers employed different interventions to encourage the pupils to express their needs. They mentioned that core ideas from the NVC model were a valuable tool, in particular the focus on needs and feelings rather than misbehaviour. Caring practices can be summarised in terms of comforting, educating, force and exceptions.

Comforting – Overwhelming Needs

The caring practices that teachers have to provide in order to meet pupils' needs on a daily basis are often of the acute kind:

> The children crash out on my lap …well, when I was 25, no problem. But now, I'd rather not... but we have to, some really need it...families look different, children are stressed...they meet so many different teachers nowadays ... some arrive at seven with a sandwich in their hand. (Laura, recorded interview)

Laura does not regard it as her main role to comfort children on her lap but considered it a necessary part of her job. In many discussions Anne, the other experienced teacher, also stressed that the pupils' need for this kind of care was greater today than in the past. This kind of need cannot be negotiated, neglected or postponed: they just have to be met immediately. Elsa, the young teacher, described how she had to leave her own group or her lunch or whatever she was doing to attend to pupils' acute need for comfort. This is something she has to do rather than what she ought to do according to her schedule, even when it means being in the wrong place.

> I have no time for it, I should not even be there, but it is like … all the time you go on some kind of feeling /…/ is worth taking the time to respond though when you see someone sitting and crying. It becomes a priority. (Elsa, recorded group interview).

According to Elsa, a large amount of work revolves around meeting acute needs, or in Noddings' (2005) words, overwhelming needs. A crying pupil needs to be comforted. She stressed that she could not do otherwise and that she did not expect that other teachers should do the work. "You have to do it, and it is always worth it," she said. As Noddings (2005) argues, the caring teacher acts personally rather than leaving it to others to take action.

Educating – The Need for Basic Skills

Developing as person involves developing the basic skills that pupils need and which teachers inferred from everyday interactions (Noddings (2005). Some pupils do not know "simple things". Laura stressed that teaching at the SAE involved training the pupils in skills that previously they would have learned at home.

> Many pupils, even more so today, do not have this knowledge when they come to school. In the past, parents sat and played games with their children, they ate dinner as a family, four people together, and waited for their turn, and they used a knife and fork, they received this sort of education. Now we have to teach them, although it is called nursing. (Laura, recorded interview).

Laura argues that SAE is about teaching these skills, as these are basic skills that everyone needs to master. In the citation below, Laura give further examples which points to the core role that SAE has in providing care for pupils' overall development. Laura described how they had to make the pupils practise walking along the corridor, instead of running. One boy had to try three times before he managed to walk the whole length of the corridor. She continued:

> Laura: … this is a form of teaching. They do not know that you should not run in the corridor. Some do not know how to dress themselves, play games together, or socialise in the same room … that this would be nursing (sv. omvårdnad) without learning? That is exactly what it is. (Laura, recorded interview.)

Of note, Laura was the only one who used the word "nursing" [sv. omvårdnad] instead of "care" [sv. omsorg], which was the term introduced in the interview. She used the word when talking about how SAE has changed and that the abilities in question do not evolve naturally by themselves or by peer interaction. They have to be learned, and this requires teaching.

Force – The Need for Variation

The teachers, in different ways, also tried to get the pupils to reassess some of their needs, such as doing the same activities every day. When they failed to convince the pupils to try new activities, they found other ways. Laura said, "we force them to try, if they do not like it, ok. then…but they need at least to try". In some cases, they placed restrictions on the pupils. For example, some boys played football every day. It was not regarded as beneficial for the boys. "We stopped the football game for some time" (Laura, recorded interview). Laura further explained that this was in the best interest of the football players, who then tried other activities. Stopping the football game for a period was also positive for those who were not invited to take part in the game as it gave rise to new group dynamics. It became beneficial for both the individual pupils' development and for the group.

Exceptions – The Needs of Others

The teachers tried in various ways to teach the pupils to accept differences and that people have different needs. Accepting differences implies that the teachers allowed pupils not to follow common rules all the time. They also made such exceptions explicit to the group. Laura exemplified this by a situation in which a pupil, Lasse, could suddenly be permitted to leave an activity. "We say, Lasse, we can see that you are upset now, and we know that

you need to be left alone for a while so...". Although the pupils had complained previously that it was unfair that not everybody had to attend (because it was presented as a compulsory activity), they all now accepted that exceptions have to be made as people may have different needs. Differences are important also because it means that we can help each other. Laura summarised her main goal at work:

> My main ambition is to teach that we are all different, we are unique, and to find this uniqueness. Then, we can also help each other. Oh, you are afraid of dogs … ok, then I can ... (Laura, recorded interview)

The teaching Laura refers to is performed both in circle time activities but also in every day interactions. Laura also noted: "No child is impossible," adding that under the surface "everybody wants to be in the group, we are social beings."

Circle Time Activity

The group was for one semester divided into two smaller groups and Ann and Laura worked with each one intensively, directing exercises aiming at developing simple skills, such as turn taking, listening, and being nice to each other, as well as having the courage to share feelings and thoughts. According to Noddings (2005), these teachers inferred that pupils (to various degrees) needed not only to develop social skills, but also to learn about other pupils needs. A specific caring practice that the teachers hence applied was the circle time activity. It starts with a round in which, for instance, everybody draws a stick with a question on it. It is supposed to be a simple question such as "what is your favourite food?" This activity is generally followed by a game, which is chosen with the particular aim of creating contact between the participants and getting pupils to play in new groupings. Laura explained later (in the interview) that it was important to do something fun together to create specific shared moments. Therefore, the teachers also took part in the games. After the game, the pupils have to solve an individual task, such as the "flower task",[6] which focuses on values and/or emotions. Sometimes the pupils are placed in pairs to interview each other or to solve a task together. The activity ends with a round in which the pupils share something with the group, for example something new they have learned about a friend.

The teachers make up their own combinations of exercises based on their experience developed during the time when "life competence skills" emerged in schools. Laura describes below how she draws on drama pedagogy, and that many years of experience of working with different groups of pupils are crucial when designing these activities.

> I learned from a drama teacher, at the time when it was the so-called 'life competence skill' (sv. livskunskap), but it is also a concept [life competence skill] that one is not allowed … and it is, well, reasonable not to buy something straight off. But I have selected... I have worked so long (Laura recorded interview).

The choice of exercises is also based on current knowledge about the group. Having knowledge about the group requires knowing individual pupils' particular needs, fears and uncertainties, something which is inferred in everyday interactions or which has been expressed in previous circle time activities or in small talk with the staff.

6 The flower task derives from SET. It involves filling in answers on paper petals on the following topics: A memory, my favourite food, something I like to do with my family, a song/music I like, or an activity I enjoy at the leisure centre.

> Even exercises that have been successful in the past, these don't work in all groups. Some exercises are only successful within a particular culture or group atmosphere. Like the card game, you have to jump around and sit on each other's laps. Many will feel uncertain. It is only if they think it is funny. That is, that is the actual craft [sv. hanverket] involved. (Laura, recorded interview)

It is important to plan the activities with the particular group in mind and, according to Laura, this is at the core of the job of an SAE teacher, the "actual craft". By performing different exercises, the pupils are trained in social skills, such as listening to each other and turn taking, and also trained to share their thoughts and feelings. According to Noddings (2005), teachers should pay less attention to inferred needs and more to expressed needs. It means that teachers should listen to their pupils. The circle time is one way of giving the pupils the opportunity to express their needs.

Discussion

The teachers in this study brought up various forms of care that were related to their conceptions of pupils' needs. Overall, care means that the pupils should feel safe in several senses. As such, the results of this study are similar to many earlier studies stressing safety as a core value in SAE (e.g. Haglund, 2015a; Jonsson, 2018).

The caring practices performed by the teachers resemble a pedagogy described in earlier SAE studies in which the development of social skills is regarded as a main task (Haglund, 2015a, Haglund, 2015b; Klerfelt & Haglund, 2014a, Klerfelt & Haglund, 2014b; Jonsson, 2018; Lager 2019). The teachers had to be ready to meet urgent, or to use Noddings' (2012) term, "overwhelming needs", which required the teachers to comfort children immediately. This kind of care is an important part of teachers' work, as noted also by Hjalmarsson, Löfdahl and Warin (2017). Caring practices are also aimed at filling the gaps in basic knowledge that the pupils lacked. This is a kind of care that in the past would have been provided at home. As such SAE has a compensatory role, which has also been identified in other studies, for instance Andishmand (2017) and Hjalmarsson and Odenbring (2019). In this study, it was not social injustice in terms of pupils' needs for proper clothes for outdoor activities, or extra snacks that needed to be addressed, as identified in Hjalmarsson & Odenbring (2019). Rather, this issue was similar to that described in Andishmandi's study (2017) in which the pupils lacked basic social skills. Pupils at Logos also needed to be trained in a range of social skills. However, several of the skills that the teachers identified that pupils needed to develop were not only about how to treat each other, but how to get dressed, walk in a corridor, eat properly and play games etc. So, despite the trend away from care towards education, reducing caring practices in schools does not appear to be an option.

Noddings (2012) argued that teachers should pay more attention to pupils' expressed needs rather than inferred needs. A caring practice that was operationalised by the teachers in this study was to run circle time activities. This allowed pupils to express needs that had previously been inferred by the teachers. The teachers in this study did not follow any of the programmes that had been criticised by Bartholdsson, Gustafsson-Lundberg and Hultin (2014) and Irisdotter, Aldenmyr and Olson (2016). In activity planning, they made use of

their long experience and singular exercise from SET were used when training pupils to express their feelings and needs. However, the needs that pupils express do not necessarily coincide with their true thoughts and their internal needs. What pupils say in circle time, as well as in daily activities, may not form part of their actual thinking but rather be socioculturally situated (cf. Schoultz et al., 2001) and part of the predominant discourse at Logos, inspired by the language of non-violent communication. The circle time activities described here can be said to form part of what Furedi (2004) described as the therapeutic trend. This "inward turn in education" and the critique of various confessional practices reviewed above (Mc Cuag, 2012; Bartholdsson, Gustafsson-Lundberg, & Hultin; 2014; Hultin, 2015) suggest that although circle time activities have the potential to contribute to the development of both individual pupils and the group at large, they are accompanied by certain risks. If circle time activities aimed at the strengthening of social relations and the development of self-esteem are prioritised in SAE, one may miss the opportunity to develop pupils' abilities to critically analyse moral and political injustices. This is not to suggest that feelings should not be taken seriously. On the contrary, feelings are important but can also be looked upon as culturally and socially situated constructs that can be interpreted differently according to different situations (Bartholdsson & Hultin, 2014). SAE could, in other words, be a place in which care for pupils also means inviting them into the investigation of profound questions that also are intellectually challenging. It does not necessarily imply a "schoolification" of SAE, but could entail designing activities in which the focus is on philosophical issues pertinent to pupils. In other words, challenging pupils by turning them towards the world and not inwards (Bergdahl & Langmann, 2017). "Care" could, as stressed by Hjalmarsson, Löfdahl-Hultman, & Warin, (2017), be given a wide interpretation.

The teachers in this study stressed the importance of teaching tolerance, acknowledgment of each other's competencies and that we should help each other. This type of SAE teaching is in line with the vison of Logos to educate for a better world. The present study did not investigate whether this vision drove the teachers' actions or if it was something they shared regardless of place. This study involved only three teachers at a specific SAE centre in Sweden. It gives an insight into how care and caring practices can be conceptualised and performed in relation to needs. Another limitation is that the observations did not account for how much of the time staff spent on the various forms of care. Neither does the study account for how the caring practices were received by the pupils from their point of view and in relation to their actual needs. Research from the pupils' perspective would therefore be valuable (cf. Elvstrand, & Närvänen, 2016).

Although this study is small, it points to a situation where we may see more pupils in need of learning the basic skills and social skills that earlier were taught at home. The results may be used in discussion at SAE centres in terms of which caring practices need to be strengthened and whether some have to be systematised or maybe abandoned. Different forms of care require different caring practices, or as one teacher said "teaching". It is by no means clear that all kinds of circle time activities are the best activities to teach various skills. Teachers therefore require time to reflect together on the meaning of "care" and "nursing" as well as which kind of caring practices that need to be developed or changed, and time to reflect on their own needs. Teacher education, on the other hand, should prepare the students so they can meet pupils' different needs. Last but not the least, some ques-

tions arise which may fall into the realms of philosophy: In a democratic society what are the basic needs that should be provided by SAE*?* What are the actual moral responsibilities that should be placed on SAE?

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