“It is Our Responsibility to Prepare Children for an International World”

Educators Discuss Celebrations and Traditions within Preschool Curriculum

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Abstract

Framed within a society where many Swedes consider themselves to be semi-secular, where by law schools and preschools shall be nondenominational; a paradox occurs if many preschools acknowledge celebrations and traditions of historically Christian background exclusively. Previous research has suggested potential reasons for uncertainty with regard to including celebrations and traditions with a historically religious background. Building off of that research this case study attempts to approach a more definitive answer regarding the decision process behind deciding which celebrations and traditions are included, and therefore which are excluded, from the local curriculum. Using qualitative and quantitative data, this case study is designed to answer two questions. First, ‘what specific factors are considered when an educator decides which traditions and celebrations s/he includes in the local curriculum?’; concluding that the preschool’s administration, an educator’s particular group of children, and an educator’s personal knowledge are the three specific factors considered when an educator decides which traditions and celebrations to be included in the local curriculum. Second, ‘how does an educator take cultural celebrations and traditions into consideration when designing the curriculum for the classrooms?’ further concluding that an educator takes cultural celebrations and traditions into consideration via conversation with their collegial group, recalling previous positive experiences, and active decision making. From these six factors which affect curriculum content regarding celebrations and traditions; the preschool’s administration, an educator’s particular group of children, an educator’s personal knowledge, collegial discussion, previous experiences, and active decision making, three main factors have been identified from the overlapping nature of the six factors. Summarily, this study concludes that the three factors that affect curriculum content regarding celebrations and traditions are administration, group, and knowledge. Where an educator’s group and an educator’s knowledge can be applied as a situation necessitates from two perspectives each. Where an educators group can be seen from a collegial perspective or from the perspective of the educator’s group of children. Finally, an educator’s knowledge can be divided into their personal knowledge and their previous theoretical knowledge.

Key words: celebration, cultural heritage, curriculum, early childhood education, preschool, tradition
Forward

First, to my wife Evelina, thank you. Without your heroic support this undergraduate thesis would never have come to be. Second, to my advisor Thomas Backlund, your guiding hand was instrumental in my writing process without which I may never have found my voice. Thirdly, to my peer advising group, I am ever grateful for your relevant questions and the way you all always challenged me to reach the next level of clarity in expressing my thoughts. Fourthly, to all who came before your work has been an inspiration in my writing. Finally, to all those educators who so willingly participated in my case study, this quite literally would have been impossible without you.

I feel it is also of note at this time to clarify that this study is written in American English, thusly following the grammatical patterns and spellings of American English.

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1 Introduction

The Swedish Ministry of Education and Research has declared in the School Law, first chapter sixth paragraph, that education conducted within a school or preschool with a public head officer shall be non-denominational (SFS 2010:800). That is, school systems with a public head officer will not be restricted to any religious organization (Miriam-Webster). This study will examine the suggestion that, despite this law, some local preschool curriculums include Christian traditions and celebrations at the exclusion of most others.

The Swedish National Preschool Curriculum, as written by the National Agency for Education (Skolverket), states that it is within the mission of preschools to pass on a cultural heritage. Examples of cultural heritage are listed as values, traditions and history, as well as language and knowledge that is to be passed from one generation to the next. It is not, however, made clear if the list is limiting or can be extrapolated upon (Skolverket 2016).

In the past decade Sweden has become an increasingly intercultural country. With the increased immigration rates the cultural make up of Sweden is changing; with an average of approximately 29,000 new approved asylum seekers every year between 2009 and 2017 (Migrationsverket). Not surprisingly this change has also affected the make-up of preschool classes. This change is noted in the National Swedish Preschool Curriculum, stating that the growing movement across national borders creates a cultural diversity in preschool. The curriculum lifts this with positivity, noting that this change gives the children opportunities to build respect and esteem for people regardless of their background (Skolverket 2016).

Educators currently working in Swedish preschools are bestowed with the task of teaching children aged one through six cultural heritage while simultaneously allowing for and supporting children’s own creation of culture. All the while cultural diversity should be presented in a way that builds respect and esteem for the children’s peers (Skolverket 2016). This study aims to examine specifically the values, traditions and history, language and knowledge that are in fact included in the local curriculum of one preschool.

1.1 Intercultural Profile

I am writing this undergraduate thesis at the conclusion of my Career-Based Early Years Teacher Education with an Intercultural Profile at Södertörn University in Stockholm. As the degree has an intercultural profile I, along with my fellow students, have had the opportunity to experience courses with an extra focus on the intercultural perspective.

This has meant that in many situations we, as students, have discussed and problematized the fact that culture is a multifaceted and complex term. Within this fact in
mind, that culture has many meanings depending on the context, we have also come to learn that an intercultural approach and intercultural questions cannot be defined unambiguously. Within our degree program we have discussed the tension between the particular and the universal, as well as the tension between what is given and what is constructed. We have worked with these tensions in order to understand the intercultural perspective as something to learn about theoretically, as something to learn for use in practice, as well as an approach through which to reach new depths within our education. We have learned to approach problems and questions within our field with an interdisciplinary approach which will both facilitate our own learning and learning within the group of children with whom we work.

All in all this degree program has, time and again, brought to light the importance of being able to identify one’s own as well as other’s positions within society, in conjunction with the ability to critically analyze normative practices, expressions, and experiences within the teaching environment. It is within this degree program, and with all of the above in mind, that I have formulated the following study (Södertörns högskola 2018).

1.2 Scope: Intercultural Perspective and Local Curriculum

This study is conducted within the framework of the Swedish National Preschool Curriculum as well as the intercultural profile of my current degree. Within this study the scope will be restricted by an intercultural perspective as well as the local curriculum of the preschool participating in the study. This scope is relevant in terms of the choice of the theoretical framework and method, as well as a guiding factor within the data analysis and discussion. The conclusions which this study will make are only possible within this particular scope.

Intercultural; a word combining inter-, the Latin for between or among, and culture, from the Latin cultura meaning to cultivate or care fore, is defined as occurring between or involving two or more cultures (Miriam-Webster). When an intercultural perspective is assumed by a person, that person takes two or more cultures into consideration when conducting themselves (Lahdenperä 2008).

People strive to create meaning. This creation of meaning occurs both individually and in contact with others. The creation of meaning that occurs between people is of particular interest for this study, especially when the intercultural perspective is necessary. An intercultural perspective can be defined as that which is necessary in the creation of people’s interactions with a specific focus on each individual’s culture; wherein ethnicity, religion, language, thought, life style, gender, and class all play defining roles (Lahdenperä 2008).
This intercultural perspective is necessary in a preschool environment such as that which currently occurs in Sweden. Since Sweden has become an increasingly international country the educators within preschools must take this into account in their local curriculum creation (Skolverket 2016). The scope of this study will be defined by this intercultural perspective, and the fact that educators currently in the field must strive to achieve a certain competence within the intercultural perspective.

The scope of this study is further defined by the specific local curriculum of the preschool that has participated in the study. Much of the Swedish National Preschool Curriculum is open to interpretation. That is, much of the curriculum does not explain outright what it is exactly an educator in a preschool environment should or should not do in specific situations. This study thusly aims to examine in what ways educators, as representatives of society, interpret the text of the national curriculum that states that values, traditions, history, language and knowledge shall be taught (Skolverket 2016). More specifically this study will focus on how the educator’s interpretations are actualized in practice at the preschool where this study is conducted.

Educators at the preschool within this study, as well as all others within Sweden, must make a decision. A decision regarding what cultural heritage will mean within their local curriculum and what must then that local curriculum include in order adequately teach cultural heritage and live up to the goals written within the Swedish National Preschool Curriculum. For the purpose of this study cultural heritage will be restricted to the Swedish National Preschool Curriculum’s description as containing values, traditions and history, as well as language and knowledge.

2 Literature Review

Here follows a short summary of five previously conducted studies. This in order to give perspective to this study as well as further define the motivation and starting point of this particular study.

2.1 Manifestations of Cultural Beliefs in the Daily Practice of Icelandic Preschools

Johanna Einarsdottir has conducted a study of Icelandic preschools. At the time of the study Icelandic preschools had existed for less than 80 years, and aimed to evaluate whether Icelandic core cultural beliefs were evident in the daily practice of two preschools. The content of this study emphasizes the educators’ roll in the children’s learning opportunities. Einarsdottir writes that a preschool educator should provide space, materials,
and situations which enable the children to play, learn and explore new possibilities.

Einarsdottir concludes that the preschool educators who participated in the study had cultural values in line with that of the Icelandic society. That is to say, according to Einarsdottir, the educators’ goals, values and beliefs are consistent with the underlying beliefs and values of the culture within which they work, as well as the society’s view of children and childrearing (Einarsdottir 2002).

The work that Einarsdottir has done is also relevant for this study, as I believe the fact that an educators’ values, goals, and beliefs being consistent with the societal cultural values can be extrapolated to other societies. The fact that society matters is of great importance to this study as well, since an educator’s roll is then always defined within the parameters of the society in which s/he works.

2.2 Democracy, caring and competence: values perspectives in ECE curricula in the Nordic countries

Johanna Einarsdottir, Anna-Maija Purola, Eva Marianne Johansson, Stig Broström and Anette Emilson have conducted a study regarding values perspectives in Nordic Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). This study examined how the Nordic ECEC policies frame values education in preschools, specifically focusing on the values of democracy, caring and competence. Within this study the authors claim that values education is an area of education that calls for a deeper understanding than is currently cultivated. Through using a system perspective by examining ECEC curricula in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden the authors conclude that the Nordic curricula illustrate the direction in which children are effectively formed through a fostering of values (Einarsdottir, Purola, Johansson, Broström & Emilson 2014). The educators that work at preschools across the Nordic countries thusly have a responsibility, as depicted by the curricula through which their work is formed, to teach values of democracy, caring and competence.

The authors write in their conclusions that “[i]n the education systems, the practitioners of ECEC represent the society, with a task of instilling societally accepted values to children” (Einarsdottir et. al. 2014). This study will use this conclusion as one of the starting points from which to continue. It is highly applicable for this study to have the knowledge that as educators are representations of the society in which they teach, in all interaction with the children. Thusly the values of the society are embodied by the educators, as they act within their role as educators, and thusly societal values are taught to children in preschool environments in Scandinavia. The educator’s roll is an important one, especially
when it comes to situations within the learning environment as they relate to cultural heritage and values.

2.3 Living Simultaneity: On religion among semi-secular Swedes

Ann af Burén wrote her doctoral dissertation on religion in Sweden, in particular religion amongst a group she calls the semi-secular Swedes. Af Burén notes that Sweden is often described as an extremely secularized society. With this in mind she investigates the depth with which self-defined semi-secular Swedes identify within their secularity. Af Burén concludes that the semi-secular Swede perceives themselves as the norm within a secular society. Swedes within this group do not actively seek out religious milieus or ideas, according to af Burén, nor do they attempt to create a personal ‘religion’ by patching together different religious elements. That is to say that the respondents to af Burén’s study share an individualistic trait, and they also respond to the cultural demand for individualism and personal choice in their own ways (af Burén 2015).

In her discussion of the highly relevant role of simultaneity within the study, af Burén writes that her results provide but a piece of the puzzle regarding Swedish secularity. The results emphasizes a contradiction in the statement that Sweden is utterly secularized in a straightforward sense, contradicting the simplicity of that statement in favor of a much more complex understanding of secularity (af Burén 2015).

The study done by af Burén provides important context to this study. It is relevant to gain further understanding of the fact that Sweden is considered societally secularized; however, as af Burén notes, this secularity is very complex and in some instances very individualized. It may be very relevant in the analysis of this study’s data to be informed of the fact that among those who define themselves as semi-secular there is an across the board impression that semi-secularism is the general or normal state of Sweden’s society today.

It is of note that af Burén’s study is only one example within the current discussion of secularity in Sweden. A discussion that further includes other perspectives where secularity in Sweden is often placed within two dichotomies, either as a religiosiy in a new form, or secularity through removing the religious aspects of still practiced traditions. David Thurfjell discusses Swedish secularity in his book Det guddlösa folket, suggesting that when describing Swedish people, instead of using the term secular, post-Christian is a more accurate term, within this aforementioned dichotomous perspective (2016). That is to say af Burén’s ideas, and those of Thurfjell for that matter, are neither prevailing or universally accepted. However, for the purpose of this study the work of af Burén will be in focus.
2.4 Barnehager og høytidsmarkering: En gjennomgang og diskusjon av begrunnelser knyttet til manglende markering av ikke-kristne høytider

Audun Toft and Kristine Toft Rosland write about research done in 2010 and 2011 in Norwegian preschools. They note that despite the fact that many children in Norwegian preschools have a religious identity outside of the Norwegian Church none of the preschools within the study celebrated any holidays of any other faith besides Christianity. Within the Norwegian National Preschool Curriculum it states that children of differing ethnic groups than Norwegian shall be allowed an opportunity to develop a dual belonging to both the Norwegian and their own ethnic group. The study concludes that preschools did not at the time of writing follow the guidelines of the curriculum in regards to acknowledging holidays. Toft and Toft Rosland also conclude that one of the deciding factors of why holidays outside of the Christian religion are not acknowledged is because of a lack of knowledge among educators. The authors write that in multicultural preschools it is important for all children to be included in the preschool culture. Finally the authors suggest that preschool educators work more closely with parents in order to gain knowledge about what holidays are acknowledged by all children in attendance. This improved communication will also give preschool educators the opportunity to explain what acknowledgment of a holiday entails as well as the fact that in preschool it must not be acknowledged on any specific day (Toft & Toft Rosland 2014).

This study indicates to me that the potential current state of Swedish preschools, where Christian celebrations and traditions are acknowledged, almost at the complete exclusion of other religious celebrations and traditions, is not particular to Sweden. This study is in part inspired by the study done in Norway, to see in what ways the situation in Sweden may be similar or differ from that in Norway.

2.5 “Why Do We Celebrate?” Filling Traditions with Meaning in an Ethnically Diverse Swedish Preschool

Tünde Puskás and Naita Andersson have coauthored this study in which they attempt to answer the question “why do we celebrate?” within the preschool environment in Sweden. Puskás and Andersson note that by law Swedish preschools should be nondenominational, and the National Swedish Preschool Curriculum simultaneously states that cultural heritage shall be passed on from one generation to the next. Puskás and Andersson claim that it is thusly up to each individual educator to define the line between religion and cultural heritage. The authors write that this is contradictory in practice as it results in the exclusion of narratives, or parts of narratives, regarding cultural traditions that
have a historically religious background. Among other conclusions, such as the need for preschool educators to bridge the gap between curricular content and the child’s experience, Puskás and Andersson write that preschool educators experience some uncertainty when discussing those narratives that have a religious undertone (Puskás & Andersson 2017).

What this study does not find in the conclusions is the particular reason for why preschool educators experience this uncertainty in regard to passing on cultural heritage that has a historically religious background. Puskás and Andersson suggest three possible reasons for educators’ uncertainty. First, the fact that the National Swedish Preschool Curriculum does not state clearly whether religion is a part of cultural heritage or not requiring educators to make that decision themselves. Second, that it is possible that preschool educators lack knowledge regarding cultural narratives with religious backgrounds, or third, that preschool educators have the knowledge but consider these narratives too complex for preschool aged children (2017).

This study has been greatly inspired by Puskás and Andersson’s work and I hope to be able to answer, at least in part, why preschool educators may be uncertain in their work with cultural heritage that has religious history.

2.6 Summary

Each of the above mentioned studies are vitally related to this study. Looking at a broader scale, the studies done in Iceland, Norway, as well as multiple Nordic countries give this study perspective. A perspective which is important to understand that this study is not a standalone instance, and previous research conducted has examined similar themes.

Both the studies in which Einarsdottir played a role in conduction concluded that an educator’s role is defined by the society in which they live and work (Einarsdottir 2002; Einarsdottir et. al. 2014). Educators are a defining factor regarding the potential learning environments which they have the possibility of creating. When educators are defined by and represent the society within which they teach they will then create a curriculum with the societal values at the center (Einarsdottir et. al. 2014).

This study is conducted in Sweden and the research that Ann af Burén lead provides important contextual information for this study. Understanding the semi-secular Swede as a group who assumes to adhere to the norm is important knowledge when regarding curriculum creation of the preschool educator (af Burén 2015). It is also important to be informed that the questions this study aims to answer are a continuance of previous research, mainly that conducted by Tünde Puskás and Naita Andersson. As Puskás and Andersson
conclude, they cannot say for sure why preschool educators select that which they do regarding the teaching of cultural heritage; this study aims to approach an answer (2017).

3 Theoretical Framework

Within this study terms such as acknowledgement, celebration, holiday, norm, tradition, and value will be used in data collection and analysis. For the purpose of this study the definitions available from the Miriam-Webster dictionary will be attributed to these terms:

- Acknowledgement: the act of acknowledging (taking notice of) something or someone.
- Celebration: (from celebrate): to mark (something, such as an anniversary) by festivities or other deviation from routine.
- Holiday: holy day, a day set aside for special religious observance.
- Norm: a principle of right action binding upon the members of a group and serving to guide, control or regulate proper and acceptable behavior.
- Tradition: an inherited, established, or customary pattern of thought, action or behavior (such as religious practice or a social custom).
- Value: something (such as a principle or quality) intrinsically valuable or desirable (Miriam Webster).

It is relevant to define such terms at this point to further clarify the scope of this study. It is of note to clarify that the term holiday will not be used furthermore in relation to this study, but rather the term celebration will be used as encompassing both words, furthermore specifically including that which is not closely related to a specific religious observance. Other conducted previous research does use the term holiday, and it is therefore important to define. However, for the purpose of this study the term celebration will encompass and include holidays.

3.1 The Other

Within the intercultural scope of this study exists the notion of the Other. The intercultural perspective requires a meeting of two people. This notion of the Other is one’s own relation to another, an Other, where certain things can be brought into focus. It is of utmost importance for this study, in relation to the intercultural perspective and meaning creation, that a relationship between two people is examined. Theories about this relationship exist and help to define that relationship, one such philosopher’s theories about the Other will be used in this study in order to make clear the basis of this study’s conclusions. Here the theories of philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas will be discussed.
The philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas has a particular take on the Other which will later provide an appropriate context for the results and conclusions of this study. Like many philosophers of his time Emmanuel Lévinas (1906-1995) was affected in his thinking by the events of World War II, particularly by his time spent in a German concentration camp. As a direct result of this one of the cornerstones of his thinking on peace is that one may not, or it is impossible for one to, understand another person’s life (Lévinas 1988).

Lévinas discusses ethics as it relates to and is created in the individual meeting the Other. When one person comes in contact with, or meets, another it is done from one face to another. It is within this meeting that one is naturally bound by ethical considerations to an Other. The bond created in one’s meeting an Other is expressed through the face and the ethical condition of responsibility to that Other. It is in this meeting of one face to another where empathy is created, and empathy becomes the connection one has with the Other (Lévinas 1969).

Lévinas goes on to further define the Other and one’s duties, responsibilities and allowances in regard to the Other, stating that one may not physically or psychologically destroy the Other’s existence. It was also Lévinas who stated that one’s relationship with another is not solely a matter of what we can know about that person. Lévinas states that we as people are inclined to transform everything we encounter to objects or things which in turn means we overlook the fact that we cannot understand ourselves or the Other with that type of objective thinking. That there is something in every person which avoids classification and systematization (Lévinas 1988). Lévinas challenges us to expand our thinking in regards to the Other.

Lévinas writes that one has a responsibility for the Other, a responsibility for what is not one’s own or even concerns one’s self or for that which does concern one’s self, as that which one approaches as a being (1988). In his discussion of ethics, Lévinas writes that the relation with the Other puts into question one’s freedom, as one is called to responsibility (1969).

It is this particular responsibility to the Other, as it is defined by Lévinas, which will aid in the analysis of the data of this study. The fact that as one meets an Other, interacts with and communicates with that Other, one indubitably becomes both a part of that Other as that Other becomes a part of one’s self. It is within this interaction with the Other that one assumes responsibility for that Other. In this study the responsibility to the Other as it pertains to the preschool educators will be in focus.
3.2 Intercultural Competence

The intercultural perspective includes many aspects, one of which in specific regard to education, is intercultural competence. Generally speaking, Arnd Witte and Theo Harden, a lecturer and researcher of intercultural competence and a professor and researcher of linguistics and second language studies respectively, note that intercultural competence is a term that is highly dependent on the context within which they are used. Witte and Harden thusly consider intercultural competence to be an interdisciplinary subject (2011). Within that vein Werner Müller-Pelzer, a language professor and researcher, writes that intercultural competence demands an array of competence stemming from different common situations. According to Müller-Peltzer one who aims to achieve intercultural competence must also attain an analytical intelligence as well as a corporeal intelligence. Where analytical intelligence is used to gain a sense of the meaningfulness of a situation and corporeal intelligence is the ability to relate and react to that meaningfulness in the best possible manner (Müller-Pelzer 2011). It is the intercultural competence of preschool educators that this study is concerned with.

As noted in the Swedish National Preschool Curriculum, Sweden has become an increasingly intercultural country. The educators within preschools must also take this into consideration when creating their local curriculum (Skolverket 2016). Educators must also then attain a certain competence with regards to intercultural teaching, or intercultural pedagogy.

Hans Lorentz, a professor and researcher of the cultural and societal sciences, claims that intercultural pedagogical competence is necessary in the school environment. By intercultural pedagogical competence Lorentz describes the vital relationship between educator and student as well as the cooperation between educators and students, and educators and parents. Lorentz writes that intercultural pedagogical competence is anchored in the actions between people often regarding communication and understanding, with a goal of achieving an understanding of our multicultural, globalized and internationalized world (2016).

3.3 Summary of Theoretical Framework

A case study such as this lends itself to the above theories, in relation to the intercultural perspective, of the Other and an educator’s intercultural competence. As this study is built upon the literature that has come before it, in an attempt to deepen an understanding of preschool educator’s local curriculum creation in relation to celebrations and traditions, these theories will provide necessary framework with which to analyze the data and
results, as well as provide a clear basis for the study’s conclusions. Theory regarding the Other and intercultural competence put focus on educator’s relationships within their work.

Practicing preschool educators come in daily contact with colleagues, parents and children. That is preschool educators have daily contact with the Other, one other than themselves. The definitions Emmanuel Lévinas gives the Other, the restrictions and responsibilities applied to a person in relation to an Other, will be highly relevant in data analysis and drawing conclusions within a necessary and relevant framework.

Within the intercultural perspective an important aspect with regards to educators in practice is their intercultural competence. In order to better asses the data of this study a measure of intercultural competence will be applied. Intercultural competence provides an important structure for this study to build off of previous research and come to applicable conclusions.

It is vital to focus on these specific aspects of the intercultural perspective considering this case study, in order for the results and conclusions to be able to be understood within a context. A clear definition of the Other and intercultural competence will also provide restrictions for the conclusions this study will be able to draw. Restrictions that hold the conclusions to the educator’s relationships within their practice. These restrictions are vital in that they also allow for a focus and depth to be reached in conclusion making. Conclusions which will largely be drawn from the following interviews of six currently active preschool educators.

4 Problem Statement
As is stated in the conclusion of the first introductory paragraph this study will examine the fact that, despite the law stating that schools with a public head officer shall be nondenominational, some local preschool curriculums include Christian traditions and celebrations at the exclusion of most others.

4.1 Purpose
The purpose of this study is to examine which celebrations and traditions are acknowledged within the local curriculum of a preschool in the Södermanland County on the South East coast of Sweden. Considering that the contents of a preschool’s curriculum will define the values and norms taught there, and thusly providing the framework for the knowledge that children have the opportunity to obtain. This study will focus specifically on finding an in depth answer to why preschool educators choose the celebrations and traditions they include within their local curriculum.
4.2 Research Questions

In order to approach a deeper understanding of the teaching of culture and heritage in Swedish preschools I have formulated the following research questions:

- What specific factors are considered when an educator decides which traditions and celebrations s/he includes in the local curriculum?
- How does an educator take cultural celebrations and traditions into consideration when designing the curriculum for the classrooms?

5 Method

The methodology of this study has been mainly defined by the definitions outlined in the writings of Runa Patel and Bo Davidson. Both Patel and Davidson are professors in research methodology at Linköping University, Sweden, within the Department of Behavioral Sciences and Learning (2011).

5.1 Data Collection

This study is a case study where one preschool has been selected where I have conducted my research. As is the case with all case studies the goal has been to assume a holistic perspective in order to collect comprehensive data. This is a case study with a descriptive nature. That is, I have delved deeply into the current preschool culture in Sweden as it relates to religion and cultural heritage. The goal is thusly to have produced results that are detailed and fundamental (Patel & Davidson 2011).

In order to achieve results with depth, from within the current preschool culture in Sweden as it relates to religion and cultural heritage, I have collected both quantitative and qualitative data. This is not a new approach as much research within the social and behavioral sciences land somewhere between purely quantitative data collection and purely qualitative data collection (Patel & Davidson 2011).

5.1.1 Questionnaire

The quantitative data has been collected through a questionnaire, which has been statistically analyzed, and used as the basis for interview selection (Questionnaire, s. 39). The questionnaire was created using standardized and structured questions designed to limit the amount of input allowed. Limited answers have resulted in a high response rate and data that is easily analyzed (Patel & Davidson 2011). The qualitative data has given a relatively accurate description of the traditions and celebrations currently included in the preschool’s local curriculum.
5.1.2 Interviews

After collection of the questionnaire was completed I selected 6 questionnaires as a basis to conduct a qualitative interview. That is, my results and conclusions are mainly based on this qualitative data, where the quantitative data has been used as a tool to both better understand the preschool as a whole as well as the underlying selection method for my interviews. The interviews have provided a means to approach a deeper, relevant, and more holistic view in order to answer my research questions, which the quantitative data alone cannot answer. The goal in interview selection was to collect a range of responses. I have formulated my interview guide using a reverse funnel technique, where my respondents have answered shorter more specific questions at first and the interview concluded with more general and holistic questions (Patel & Davidson 2011; Interview Guide s. 38).

5.2 Selection

I have collected questionnaire responses from 37 educators at one preschool in the Södermanland County. I have made a conscious choice when selecting the preschool and educators selected for this study. The preschool is my current place of employment and the educators are my colleagues, this selection was made to maximize the number of answers my questionnaire will receive. As I currently work at a preschool with over 40 employed educators and over 200 children in attendance I also saw advantages for using this particular preschool. With a high response rate and many respondents of my questionnaire my data can be generalized in a way which would not be as relevant were I to collect responses from a significantly smaller preschool. Though, since I have not randomly selected the population for my case study the generalizations that are able to be made as a result of the study will be limited (Patel & Davidson 2011).

An underlying goal in my decision as to which educators I have asked to interview has been to find both a difference of opinion and a difference of personal background. Herein I found an advantage to conducting this case study at my current place of employment. I have, during my years at this particular preschool, learned about my colleagues personal backgrounds which I would not otherwise have had access to. That is, were this study to be conducted again the questionnaire would need to be edited to include information about the respondents background (Questionnaire, s. 39). I believe it is also of note to mention a potential difference between a respondents reported background, and that which I have learned over years of knowing these people. The knowledge I have is potentially incomparable regarding my respondents personal background, and thusly my knowledge of their potential to answer my interview questions with varying responses could be
irreplaceable. In my search for the answers regarding the details of how and why an educator constructs their curriculum in the way that s/he does, varying answers will give this study a depth characteristic of qualitative data collection (Patel & Davidson 2011).

It is also of note at this time to state that the preschool in this case study is a private preschool, and thusly does not technically fall under the School Law stating that the preschool shall be nondenominational (SFS 2010:800). However, it is stated clearly by the preschool in both external and internal documents that the preschool does follow the School Law in its entirety. This is another instance of knowledge that I, as an employee of this particular preschool, have which may not be accessible to a researcher outside of the organization.

**5.2.1 Presentation of Respondents**

This study includes interviews of six preschool educators currently in practice. Claudia, Kaia and Charvi have a high school degree or equivalent; where Ide, Magnus and Anna have a university degree. Claudia has worked in preschools in Sweden for 14 years and she is 39 years old. Kaia has worked in Swedish preschools for a total of ten years and she is 53 years old. Charvi is 27 years old and she has ten years of experience working at preschools in Sweden. Ide is 25 years old and finished her university teaching degree this year, she has worked one half year at her current preschool. Magnus is 36 years old and he has nine years of experience working at two different preschools in Södermanland County. Anna has worked at an array of preschools for a total duration of 15 years, she is 51 years old.

**Table 1:** a chart depicting the above information regarding the respondents to this case study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educator</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Years’ Experience</th>
<th>Degree of Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ide</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>University Degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magnus</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>University Degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charvi</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>High School or Equivalent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaia</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>High School or Equivalent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claudia</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>High School or Equivalent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>University Degree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**5.3 Implementation**

In order to collect my questionnaire answers I visited each preschool group at the preschool and personally spoke to every educator there. I waited on hand while the educators filled in their questionnaire as to be available were uncertainties to arise, where the only question I answered was regarding what the “Other” option meant. I found that this implementation method resulted in a very high response rate, where I was able to collect responses from 93% of possible respondents.
At the time of filling in each questionnaire I also went over the information and consent form with each of the respondents and explained verbally what it means to participate in a case study (Information and Consent Form, s. 41-42). Each respondent was also e-mailed a copy of the information and consent form for their own personal records.

Once all questionnaires were collected I used the answers I received to help me assess which educators to invite to the interview process at the next stage of the case study. I chose three educators with a maximum education at the high school level (or equivalent), and three educators with a university degree in teaching. Of these six interviewees I attempted to choose individuals with varying cultural backgrounds. That is I have interviewed educators who have spent their entire life in Sweden, educators who have moved to Sweden in their childhood or adulthood, and educators who have lived in Sweden their entire lives and have one or more parents or guardians who were born outside of Sweden. This information is amongst that which I personally already had regarding the respondents; these aspects were not reported in the questionnaire. To reiterate, the questionnaire would need to be expanded upon were a researcher without this type of knowledge about their respondents to conduct a similar case study in the future (Questionnaire, s. 39). Furthermore, the interviewees range in age from 25 to 53 years old and they have between one half year and 15 years of experience working in Swedish preschools. The main goal in selecting the educators to interview was to receive a wide range of in depth answers. Thusly each individual’s questionnaire responses were taken into great consideration.

Once I had selected my interview respondents I invited them to an interview time. Informing them via this invitation that we would discuss their questionnaire responses during the interview. At the start of each interview I reviewed the consent form and got verbal confirmation that a tape recording of the interview session would be acceptable. In one case I did not receive consent to record the voice of an interviewee, so that interview I annotated by hand. All the interviews were conducted at the preschool during the respondents working hours. That is the respondents were not required to spend time outside of work answering the interview questions.

At the completion of all data collection, both the quantitative questionnaire and the qualitative interviews, I began my data processing.
5.4 Data Processing

Once the data was collected it was then processed. The questionnaire answers were input into Microsoft Excel for further analysis (Table 2, s. 43). Further tables and figures were created using the Microsoft Excel functions to aid in data analysis (Table 2, s. 43; Figure 1, s. 18; Figure 2, s. 18; Figure 3, s. 19). All data from the interviews was transcribed into one document. After which the data was reviewed repeatedly during the analysis process.

5.5 Limitations

Here the limitations of this particular study are discussed. This case study’s generalization is limited in regards to the quantitative and qualitative data that has been collected. The preschool has not been selected randomly, and thusly there are limitations to how the quantitative data can be generalized. The conclusions made from the qualitative data have a possibility to be generalized, though further research would be necessary in order to confirm this case study’s result at a larger scale.

In order to come to reasonable conclusions when answering this study’s research questions certain limitations with regard to the theoretical framework have been applied. Thusly Emmanuel Lévinas’ theories on the Other, and Hans Lorentz’s description of intercultural pedagogical competence will be used to structure the analysis and conclusions of this study. This will limit the conclusions to each specific educator’s relationships within their practice in regard to this study’s research questions. These and the following limitations are vital in that they also allow for a focus and depth to be reached in the conclusions drawn from the following interviews.

A further discussion of this case study’s validity and reliability follow.

5.5.1 Validity

The validity of this study is affected by the researcher’s ability to collect data which provides a basis to give a credible interpretation of that which is to be studied. A researcher’s ability to capture that which is ambiguous and potentially contradictory within a study also determines a study’s validity. Finally the validity of a study is also determined by the researcher’s ability to communicate the data interpretations that are made in a clear and understandable manner (Patel & Davidson 2011).

For this particular study a range of data was collected to provide the basis for credible interpretations. The combination of a questionnaire and interviews, where the response rate was approximately 93% for the questionnaire and 100% for the interviews, has provided this basis. Within the interview responses a range of responses were recorded, which
at times resulted in contradictory data to be interpreted in the discussion and conclusion sections of this study. Ideally this study has been presented in a clear manner where all interpretations made in the discussion and conclusion are done so in a comprehensible manner. Thusly the validity of this study is considered to be somewhat high.

5.5.2 Reliability
The reliability of this study is considered to be relatively low. Since much of the data with which conclusions will be drawn is qualitative, in the form of interview responses, the same interview questions and themes can be used in future studies and yield varying results. It is not expected that this study, were it conducted again at the same or a different preschool, would yield the exact same data (Patel & Davidson 2011).

Even the reliability of the quantitative data is low because of the variable nature of a local preschool curriculum. That is at other preschools, or even the same preschool in the future, the quantitative data in the form of questionnaire results could very possibly yield a different set of data results (Patel & Davidson 2011).

6 Ethical Considerations
It is relevant to note that my personal relationship with the respondents of this study may have had an effect on the results. Both in regard to the percent of questionnaire answers received and the responses to the interview questions. Among other considerations my previous knowledge has affected the selection of interviewees. The fact that I have a previous relationship with my respondents may also have affected the type of answers and potentially the depth of responses I received during the interviewing process. Other ethical considerations at the time of writing this particular study are further discussed below.

6.1 Research Ethics
Within research ethics there are a few applicable concepts to consider with relation to this study. Confidentiality is a general obligation not to share the information gained in confidence while also protecting against the unnecessary sharing of information or data. Within this study the respondents have been assured a degree of confidentiality when not expressly prohibited by law (Vetenskapsrådet 2017).

The respondents of this study were also guaranteed anonymity. The respondents names have been removed from the questionnaire responses, and those who completed interviews have been assigned a pseudonym. This in order to remove the possibility that a respondent can be directly connected with their answers (Vetenskapsrådet 2017).
6.2 Consent
In order to ethically collect responses for this case study all respondents signed a consent form. All respondents were e-mailed a copy of the consent form, given it in hand to read upon signing, and a verbal explanation was given at the time of signing. For those respondents who partook in an interview verbal affirmation was received in those instances when the respondent was taped. For the respondent who was not taped consent was given for written annotations of the interview.

6.3 General Data Protection Regulation
As of May 25th, 2018 the new General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) was put into effect, regulating the processing of personal data relating to individuals within the European Union (EU). These regulations apply to individuals, companies, and organizations (European Commission 2018).

As it pertains to this study, GDPR regulates the collection of sensitive personal data, such as religious or philosophical beliefs, among other things. In order to collect this type of data for this study freely given, specific and informed consent must be given by the respondents (European Commission 2018). Consent was obtained via the information and consent form (s. 41-42).

7 Results and Analysis
The results of this study and analysis of data follows. A response rate of almost 93% of possible answered questionnaires and all six interviews successfully conducted has provided for a good basis on which to build the conclusions which follow.

7.1 Quantitative Data
The initial task once the questionnaire data was collected was to compile all responses in a table (Table 2, s. 43). All of the celebrations and traditions included in the questionnaire, or as a write in answer, which educators indicated as a part of their curriculum were then sorted into six categories:
Table 3: a representation chart where each celebration and tradition that was included in the local preschool curriculum is categorized into the categories listed in the first row.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Christian</th>
<th>Pagan</th>
<th>Islamic</th>
<th>Swedish Tradition</th>
<th>Global Celebration</th>
<th>Preschool Based</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Epiphany</td>
<td>Halloween</td>
<td>Eid al-Adha</td>
<td>Waffle Day</td>
<td>Teddy Bear Day</td>
<td>Preschool’s Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saint Knut’s Day</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sweden’s National Day</td>
<td>United Nation’s Day</td>
<td>Trash Pick-up Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fat Tuesday</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>New Year’s Eve</td>
<td>Fall Costume Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valentine’s Day</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easter</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walpurgis’ Night</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ascension Day</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midsummer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Saints’ Day</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saint Lucia’s Day</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christmas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the purpose of this study I have made some distinctions between Christian celebrations, Pagan celebrations, and Swedish Traditions. It is of note to mention that there is overlap between these three categories and an ongoing debate about which category each above listed celebration should be placed within. This study does not aim to add to or answer that debate and I have thusly made my decisions for the purpose of being able to further analyze my data. These decisions have been made mainly from a historic perspective and should certainly not be considered absolute or unproblematic; though, the categories above are ultimately functional for the purpose of this study.

From Table 3 the following figure was created to highlight what percent of celebrations or traditions each category had on the answered questionnaires:

![Category of Celebration](image)

Figure 1: Shows the percent of possible celebrations and traditions that was included in the entire preschool’s local curriculum. This is entirely based on the six categories from Table 3.
All responses were then analyzed in order to clearly represent the celebrations and traditions that are included in the local curriculum of this preschool, and how many educators indicated that these celebrations and traditions are included in their particular curriculum.

Figure 2: Displays the actual number of instances each celebration or tradition is acknowledged by a preschool educator.

These celebrations and traditions, which were included in the local curriculum, were then analyzed in order to clearly display how often an educator included a given celebration or tradition in their curriculum. That is, the following graph shows at what percent each celebration and tradition occurs in the local curriculum of this preschool, as reported by the educators.
Figure 3: Shows the percentage of each actual occurrence of a preschool educator reporting the acknowledgement of a celebration or tradition within each of the six categories from Table 3.

After completed data analysis of the questionnaire data each individual questionnaire was examined in order to determine which educators to invite to an interview session. All respondents were first divided into two groups depending on the level of education achieved. Three respondents were chosen from the group that had completed a high school level education or equivalent, and three respondents were chosen from the group that had completed a university degree. This process looked for varying questionnaire responses as well as differences in the personal background of the individual respondents.

7.1.1 Summary of Quantitative Data
The quantitative data of this study shows that at this particular preschool in Södermanland Sweden 22 different celebrations and traditions are acknowledged in some manner. Saint Lucy’s Day received 36 of 37 possible responses, meaning that 97.3% of responding educators include the celebration in their local curriculum. Easter, Preschool Day and Christmas followed as the second most often reported celebration or tradition acknowledged at this preschool, with 91.9% of educators reporting their inclusion in local curriculum. Of these top four celebrations and traditions three are historically based in the Christian religion. Waffle Day and Eid al-Adha were only reported by one educator each, resulting in a 0.03% response rate. That is one historically Islamic celebration and one Swedish Tradition were the least often celebrated at this preschool.

The quantitative data also shows that 61% of the reported celebrations and traditions that occur in the local curriculum have a background in the Christian religion. The
remaining 39% of celebrations and traditions acknowledged at this particular preschool are divided in the following manner: 19% Preschool Based, 11% Global Celebrations, 5% Swedish Tradition, 4% Pagan, and finally, where the only celebration within the Islamic religion as reported by one educator, is then rounded down to 0% of the overall data. This data supports the idea in this study’s introduction which suggests that many preschools in Sweden acknowledge a majority of celebrations and traditions based in the Christian religion. This data does not make clear what educators do and say in practice. In order to connect this quantitative data to Lévinas’ theories on the Other and Lorentz’s ideas regarding intercultural pedagogical competency a deeper understand of what educators do in their practice is necessary. In order to gain a better understanding of educator’s thoughts and reasoning of their practice, and achieve a more in depth understanding of their local curriculum creation the following qualitative data was collected.

7.2 Qualitative Responses
Once the interview respondents were selected based on their questionnaire answers, education level, and personal background they were invited to an interview time during their normal working hours. All interviews were recorded either by taping or hand written notations. The themes discussed in the interviews regarded who makes decisions directly affecting the contents of the local curriculum, previous experiences with celebrations and traditions discussed, motivating that which is included and/or excluded from the curriculum, and at times mode of acknowledgement (Interview Guide, s. 40). These themes were specifically chosen in order to approach a depth of understanding of this case study’s research questions within an interview setting. The interview analysis that follows begins with the three individuals who have a high school education or equivalent followed by the three individuals who have a university degree. Names have been changed to assure anonymity.

7.2.1 “So that the children can understand the society they live in.”
I sat down with Claudia in a small office where the drops of rain falling outside echoed noisily through the ajar window. As we enter Claudia mentions the fresh air is nice. Claudia goes on to tell me that in her group they have looked at which celebrations and traditions are Swedish. The goal in her group is to teach Swedish celebrations and traditions to a group of children that may not have personal experience of them, or if they do give them the opportunity to better understand these celebrations and traditions. Claudia considers Preschool’s Day, Midsummer and Epiphany to be Swedish celebrations.
Claudia goes on to discuss Valentine’s Day, explaining that since this holiday has become more popular in Sweden it is important to acknowledge it in the preschool setting. Claudia finds it very important to help the children in her group understand that which is going on around them. Claudia feels a responsibility to acknowledge that which society as a whole partakes in, which she says in her own words is “[s]o that the children can understand the society they live in.”

According to Claudia the celebrations and traditions that her group acknowledges is a balance between what the administrations of the preschool decides will be celebrated, in accordance with the Swedish National Preschool Curriculum, and what she and her colleagues decide is most relevant for their group of children that school year. Claudia thinks the most important celebrations and traditions to acknowledge are those that the children are interested and engaged in, and those that Swedish society acknowledges on a large scale.

After my discussion with Claudia I could see many connections with Lévinas theories about a person’s responsibility for the Other. Lévinas writes that one, in meeting an Other, must take on a responsibility for that other (1969; 1988). I believe that Claudia truly attempts to do this. Claudia not only bases her decisions on celebrations and traditions according to what preschool administration decides, but most importantly Claudia makes sure to include that which is most relatable and interesting to the child, the Other in this instance.

In an increasingly intercultural society the responsibility for the Other becomes increasingly relevant. Claudia describes her interactions with the children in her group, not only from the perspective of her responsibility to them, but also through a lens of intercultural pedagogical competence. Claudia explains that her interactions with the children are based in the mutual goal of communication and understanding in order to better understand our globalized world. This is intercultural pedagogical competence (Lorentz 2016).

7.2.2 “It is our responsibility to prepare children for an international world.”
Kaia and I discussed her questionnaire at the very end of her work day and it seemed to me at the beginning of our discussion that her thoughts were still with the children. Once we got into a better flow of conversation she was eager to give me detailed explanations of her thoughts and ideas.

We first talked about Fat Tuesday where Kaia explained that they acknowledge that particular day by bringing it up at circle time the Wednesday after. Kaia remembers that last year they discussed that it is on Fat Tuesday that many people begin to fast before Easter. Though Kaia was quick to add that they do not go more deeply into the religious background
of Fat Tuesday. Rather Kaia and her colleagues ask the children if they have eaten semlor, a Swedish bun often containing almond paste and whipped cream. Kaia tries to help the children make concrete connections between a particular celebration or tradition and their own actions.

Kaia thinks for a moment and then explains her thoughts on the fact that she and her colleagues do not discuss the religious background of Fat Tuesday, or the other celebrations and traditions they acknowledge at preschool. Kaia first explains that because of her particular background she has lots of experience with Christian celebrations and traditions from the country where she was born. Kaia goes on to say that she does in fact think that preschool aged children have the ability to understand the religious history of celebrations and traditions, and that preschool educators could and should have the ability to teach that history without affecting the child’s personal beliefs one way or the other. Kaia believes that it is important to, from the beginning, understand all aspects of a concept, such as a celebration or tradition. In her own words Kaia says that “it is our responsibility to prepare children for an international world.” Explaining this further by asking the rhetorical question that, without the whole picture, what then do the children really understand? Kaia believes that children would become more tolerant adults if they were exposed to the world’s many religions starting at a young age.

I believe that Kaia expresses a willingness to take on her responsibility for the Other, the children in her group. Though she takes on this responsibility in a different manner than Claudia, Kaia also feels a need to teach the children in her group and prepare them for an international and globalized world. Kaia’s intercultural pedagogical competence shows itself in her willingness and desire to realistically prepare the children in her group for the society in which they live. As Lévinas writes, Kaia experiences a duty to the Other, the child in her group, to be the best possible educator (1969). In her duty she knows that she is not to apply any religious context to the celebrations and traditions acknowledged in the preschool curriculum; however, she experiences a conflict as she does not wholly agree with this policy as she believes it is in conflict with her ability to prepare the children in her group for an international world.
7.2.3 “I need to set aside much of what I know and have personally experienced...”

When I entered the room to interview Charvi she was already sitting comfortably in a rather small chair designed for children under four years of age. I sat down in a similar chair across the table from her and we began our discussion. Charvi told me that she has had the opportunity to work in many of the preschool’s groups. Charvi thinks this gave her an interesting perspective when she was filling in the questionnaire.

The administration of the preschool decides many of the celebrations and traditions which are acknowledged in the preschool, according to Charvi. Charvi goes on to name Midsummer, Trash Pickup Day, Lucia, Advent, Christmas, the Fall Costume Party and Preschool’s Day as those celebrations and traditions depicted by administration to be acknowledged by all groups. Administration gives each group, Charvi continues, certain guidelines within which to acknowledge these celebrations and traditions. Our individual groups then have the freedom to decide what activities we offer within those guidelines, she explains. Stating that what we acknowledge is a balance between each individual collegial group and what administration decides.

Within each group Charvi has noticed that in her interactions with the children during these celebrations and traditions she balances that which she has decided with her colleagues, and that which the children bring up in the moment and the children’s reactions to that which is being acknowledged. It is important for Charvi that the children in her group are equally active in celebrations and traditions as the educators. Though Charvi reflects at this time that she never goes particularly deep into any of the celebrations or traditions in her interactions with the children.

Charvi continues to tell me about her own personal background within the Christian Church and the fact that she has a lot of personal experience with the Christian celebrations and traditions. Immediately Charvi discloses that she feels that much of this knowledge is not applicable in the preschool environment, since educators are not allowed to teach religion in preschool. In her own words Charvi says “I need to set aside much of what I know and have personally experienced, regarding Christian celebrations and traditions, when I am in the preschool environment.” Instead I have a responsibility to differentiate between that which is Swedish tradition and Christian tradition, only including Swedish tradition in the curriculum.

I feel that Charvi expresses her responsibility to the Other as it relates to her own personal experiences. From what Charvi told me during the interview I feel that she is
somewhat conflicted in her role as an educator, since she has a responsibility within her profession to follow the laws and regulations; however, there is a lot of knowledge she is not sharing with the children. Despite this internal conflict Charvi has made it clear to me that what the children show interest in and what the children’s parents find appropriate is what needs to be the guiding factor. I feel that this is a great example of Lévinas theories on the Other and one’s personal responsibility to an Other specifically regarding those instances where one does not have full control over one’s own responsibility (1988). However, I simultaneously wonder if she truly takes on the responsibility to the Other as Lévinas defines it. During our discussion we focused mostly on Charvi herself and her role, speaking less about the children she is educating.

7.2.4 “In order to provide a learning opportunity for the children.”

Ide came bouncing into the room at her booked interview time, I felt that she was looking forward to telling me her thoughts on the questionnaire. In the same sentence where Ide noted that this is her first job within education she also explained that the current curriculum content for her group is dependent upon what the children find interesting and engaging.

Ide went on to explain that she knows that her particular group of children acknowledged many different celebrations and traditions at home. Expressing a will to be able to discuss with the children even those celebrations and traditions that may not have been a part of the planned curriculum. Ida explained that she wants to be able to acknowledge life in a holistic manner. Understanding that each individual celebration and tradition that is included in the preschool curriculum may not have any particular meaning for some children, and that needs to also be allowed for. The most important thing, according to Ide, is that the celebrations and traditions which are most relevant for the specific group of children she is working with at the time should be able to be acknowledged and discussed at preschool.

Those times when Ide does include celebrations or traditions that some but not all of the group of children have experience with she finds it of utmost importance to leave room for the children to explore these at will. In her own words, Ide does this “[i]n order to provide a learning opportunity for the children.” Where it is both important to learn more about that which is already familiar, but also learn about that which is unknown.

Right from the beginning I felt that Ide took on her responsibility for the Other, as Lévinas describes it. Throughout our conversation Ide returned, time and again, to the importance of relevant curriculum material that aid in the children’s learning experience and
provide learning opportunities. Ide expressed herself in a way that gave me the impression that when she is at work she is there for the children, the Other. She sees and understands her responsibility in her interactions with the Other, the responsibility which Lévinas states occurs within the interactions (1988). The way that Ida leaves an openness to her curriculum gives me the impression that she is waiting for these interactions to occur in order to know the correct curriculum to build together with the children, together with the Other.

7.2.5 “It is just as important to decide what not to acknowledge as it is to decide what should be included in the curriculum.”

Magnus sat down with me one morning in November in the small office in his wing of the preschool, it was before many of the children in his group had arrived and the quiet was palpable. We started the interview by discussing the content of the curriculum in the group where he works, Magnus said that the way that they decide what to acknowledge is mainly a result of what he and his colleagues want to acknowledge at times with a guiding hand from administration. Quickly listing Midsummer, Easter, Lucia, Advent and Eid as the most relevant celebrations and traditions in his experience. Magnus goes on to explain that there are many children in his group that acknowledge these celebrations and traditions at home, and it is therefore important to acknowledge them at preschool.

That which Magnus listed as the most relevant celebrations were also those which he had the most personal experience with, aside from Eid. Where Midsummer was the single tradition he had the most experience celebrating. Magnus went on to say that it is particularly important for his group that Eid is acknowledged as it is relevant for the children. Continuing that he feels that it is his responsibility to be able to discuss and acknowledge those celebrations and traditions that are relevant for his particular group.

However, Magnus also thinks it’s important to focus on creating learning opportunities for the children. That celebrations and traditions should not take too large a role in his curriculum. In his own words Magnus said that “[i]t is just as important to decide what not to acknowledge as it is to decide what should be included in the curriculum”, where the group of children should have a hand in deciding the content of the curriculum.

After Magnus’s interview I feel that he has expressed a certain intercultural pedagogical competence. Magnus is open to including that which is not familiar to him in his curriculum, he even thinks it is of utmost importance when that inclusion is relevant for the children in his group. Magnus takes the time to attempt to understand the children in his group and their experience in the world. It is within these interactions between educator and child
that an intercultural pedagogical competence is necessary to create learning opportunities for both parties (Lorentz 2016).

7.2.6 “We do not live up to our mission...”
Before Anna had even finished her questionnaire she already began reflecting with me regarding its contents. I asked her immediately if she would be interested in participating in an interview. When we sat down together Anna started by discussing those celebrations and traditions on the questionnaire that she was not familiar with and those she did not include in the curriculum in her group. Anna described how she feels it is equally important to acknowledge the celebrations and traditions that are not historically Swedish, as she puts it, but also to include the celebrations and traditions that the children in the group acknowledge at home. Despite the fact that we do not get a day off for a particular celebration or tradition it may still be very important for many children, according to Anna.

We discussed what the Swedish National Preschool Curriculum states, and the fact that it is our job as preschool educators to pass on a cultural heritage (Skolverket 2016). Anna points out that it does not say that we should acknowledge Swedish celebrations and traditions, but rather a cultural heritage containing values, traditions and history, as well as language and knowledge (Skolverket 2016). Anna goes on to question the current status quo, wondering if we should, as she feels we do currently, base our decisions almost exclusively on Swedish cultural heritage since we live in Sweden.

Anna goes on to describe the way her group decides what celebrations and traditions are included in their curriculum, stating that much of what is included comes from the educators’ personal preferences and knowledge base. Noting that she feels her group only touches upon the surface of these celebrations and traditions without approaching the question of why they do what they do in their interactions with the children. Anna reflects that she doesn’t think her curriculum is currently focused on why the children do what they do at each celebration or tradition, the focus is rather upon the actual participation in activities. Though this Anna notes is likely because of what the group of children she currently works with needs.

Further on in our interview Anna expresses the need for her group, and other groups with the same age range, to decide together what is most relevant for the children. Anna believes it is important to have some similarities across groups with similar age ranges within the same preschool. Going on to mention that she sees a need to have a discussion amongst educators in order to reflect upon what celebrations and traditions should be included
in the curriculum. This discussion could ideally take place every school year in order to create the appropriate curriculum for each individual child currently enrolled, which Anna thinks parents would appreciate.

In returning to our introductory discussion about what the Swedish National Curriculum states Anna shared her thoughts on the current state of the local curriculum. In her own words, “[w]e do not live up to our mission as stated in the national curriculum when we only acknowledge that which we do today.” Anna feels that we, as educators, have missed the mark when it comes to teaching cultural heritage.

After my interview with Anna I felt that she truly attempts to take on her responsibility to the Other, the children. As Lévinas writes, it is in the interaction with the Other that one’s own responsibility to the Other is created, unavoidably (1988). As Anna is responsible for the children in her group she sees an immediate need to adjust her current curriculum in order to better serve the Other. In this reflection I also believe that Anna is exercising a degree of intercultural pedagogical competence. By showing the will to adjust her own ways in order to better the learning opportunities of the children in her group I believe that Anna is displaying her analytical competence. The analytical competence that Müller-Peltzer notes is necessary to achieve intercultural competence (2011).

7.2.7 Summary of Qualitative Data
In reference to the themes discussed in the interviews; who makes decisions regarding the contents of the local curriculum, previous experiences with celebrations and traditions discussed, motivating that which is included and/or excluded from the curriculum, and at times mode of acknowledgement, an array of answers from the interviewed educators was recorded (Interview Guide, s. 40).

It is within the theoretical framework that these interviews are analyzed, where Emmanuel Lévinas’s theories on the Other, and Hans Lorentz’s description of intercultural pedagogical competence are used to structure the analysis and conclusions of this study limiting conclusions to each specific educator’s relationships within their practice.

Many educators indicated that the administration, their collegial group and the specific group of children they work with were deciding factors in their local curriculum content. Each of these three responses can be directly related to Lévinas’ ideas about one’s responsibility to the Other when interacting with that other (1988). An educator’s relation to the children with which s/he works describes, in many instances during the interviews, that
educator’s intercultural pedagogical competence, in regards to Others who have different personal backgrounds or experiences than the educator herself/himself (Lorentz 2016).

When responding to interview themes regarding how an educator takes cultural celebrations and traditions into consideration when designing the local curriculum there was both some agreement among educators, but also a spectrum that emerged with a difference of opinion regarding specific curriculum content. The responding educators were in agreement that curriculum content regarding celebrations and traditions is determined within the collegial group, in part by personal experiences, and through an active decision making process. These answers can equally be examined through the lens of Lévinas theory of the Other where an educator’s responsibility to the child s/he works with is brought more clearly into focus.

Through this focus, brought forth by Lévinas’ theory of the Other, a differencing of opinion emerged during the interviews of Claudia and Anna. On the one side Claudia described her responsibility as an educator as teaching a curriculum that includes exclusively Swedish celebrations and traditions, seeing as she is an educator in Sweden. Anna lands then on the opposite side of the spectrum, expressing her beliefs that her responsibility necessitates the teaching of those celebrations and traditions which are most relevant for the children in her group, which includes all the celebrations and traditions that each individual child has personal experience of. According to Anna, this is what it means to truly take on an intercultural pedagogical competence when working directly with a group of children of varying backgrounds and familial cultures.

8 Discussion and Conclusions

It would be absurd to suggest that all Swedish preschools should include every worldwide celebration and tradition. I am not suggesting that. Many educators commented when answering the questionnaire that they were surprised by how little they include in their local curriculum. Personally, I do not think that an abundance of celebrations and traditions is a marker of a good or bad preschool. That which this study aims to focus on is whether this case study preschool follows the School Law, stating that preschools shall be nondenominational (SFS 2010:800). When considering celebrations and traditions specifically this study has focused on finding an in depth answer to why preschool educators choose the celebrations and traditions they include within their local curriculum.

Notably, this study was conducted at a private preschool in Sweden. By current law private preschools, as they do not have a public head officer, are not bound to be
nondenominational. Meaning that this particular preschool has more freedom to include religious celebrations and traditions than public preschools should. However, this particular preschool is also not expressly tied to or associated with any particular religion. In internal and external documents this preschool states that they follow all of the regulations set down by the authorities including the School Law. It is however relevant at this time to consider that there is a difference between being bound by law and stating that the preschool will follow the law, and in reality not be held to that statement by any outside authority.

The dichotomy that exists between public and private schools is also very relatable to Levinas’ theory on ethics and the creation of empathy. The difference between being bound by law and stating that you follow a law without being held to that statement converge if Lévinas’ perspective on empathy is applied. When empathy is the bridge from one person to an Other the responsibility for that Other which is created is impossible to avoid. Thusly, the head of a private preschool is ethically held to the same law, as mandated by his/her responsibility to the Other (Lévinas 1969). This is not to say that people never act unethically, but it is yet another reason to allow the results of this study to be considered relevant in other contexts.

It is of importance at this time to reference Ann af Buréns study of semi-secular Swedes. Seeing as those Swedes who do count themselves semi-secular also consider themselves to be a part of the majority, or within the societal norm of Sweden, it can be relevant to note that the historically Christian celebrations and traditions may no longer considered to have religious meaning among those educators who include them in their curriculum (af Burén 2015). This question, though outside the scope of this study, may still be relevant for the reader’s own consideration.

Within the interviews I conducted I have found answers to both my research questions: ‘What specific factors are considered when an educator decides which traditions and celebrations s/he includes in the local curriculum?’ and ‘How does an educator take cultural celebrations and traditions into consideration when designing the curriculum for the classrooms?’

The first specific factor dictating which celebrations and traditions are included in their local curriculum, considered by many of my respondents, is that which the administration has decided for the entirety of the preschool. Both Charvi and Magnus mention the guidelines and framework laid down by administration regarding certain celebrations and traditions such as Lucia and Halloween.
The second factor, according to all six respondents, is if the children in the group acknowledge a celebration or tradition at home, they as educators should be prepared to include it in their curriculum. Though each respondent differed in opinion on the degree to which each celebration and tradition should be acknowledged, they were in consensus that celebrations and traditions that are relevant for the children should be included.

The third factor is what the educator has personal knowledge and/or experience of in terms of celebrations and traditions. Charvi uses her personal experiences, to a degree, in her role as an educator. Magnus and Anna believe that it is indubitably the educator’s responsibility to gain knowledge in all relevant celebrations and traditions in order to create the ideal local curriculum.

There are also three main ways that the educators I interviewed take cultural celebrations and traditions into consideration when designing their local curriculum. The first way that the respondents address which celebrations and traditions to include is in discussion with their collegial group. Both during continued education days and planning meetings. All six respondents expressed the fact that the collegial group discussion is vital in deciding which celebrations and traditions are included, and thusly excluded.

Secondly, five of the six respondents reflected on the fact that they continue to do that which has worked previously, that which has engaged the children, and that which is relevant for the children. That is, depending upon the particular group they are working with Ide, Kaia, Claudia, Charvi and Anna all noted that one of the important deciding factors of what celebrations and traditions are included and excluded in their curriculum is what they have previously had in the local curriculum.

The third way that the educators I interview take cultural celebrations and traditions into consideration when creating their curriculum is by making an active decision on curriculum content. For Claudia and Kaia this means acknowledging historically Swedish celebrations and traditions. However, Anna and Magnus feel instead a greater responsibility to teach the children about the celebrations and traditions not historically based in Sweden. This final aspect of curriculum creation is the only one where the educators were not in agreement.

I find this final aspect regarding how the interviewed educators take cultural celebrations and traditions into consideration when creating the local curriculum to be the most interesting, as it is the only instance where the educators are not in agreement. This study does not answer one way or another whether the local curriculum should include only historically Swedish celebrations and traditions or should include celebrations and traditions
not historically based in Sweden. However, I do consider it to be of vital importance that preschool educators are aware of exactly what they do and do not choose to include in their local curriculum. Internal discussions that center on acknowledging celebrations and traditions and our role as educators in a Swedish preschool environment is a necessary part of a preschool that can achieve all the goals within the National Swedish Preschool Curriculum, particularly those regarding cultural heritage.

Puskás and Andersson suggest three possible reasons for educators’ uncertainty in regard to passing on cultural heritage that has a historically religious background. They then go on to suggest three reasons why this may be the case. First, the fact that the National Swedish Preschool Curriculum does not state clearly whether religion is a part of cultural heritage or not requiring educators to make that decision themselves. Second, that it is possible that preschool educators lack knowledge regarding cultural narratives with religious backgrounds, or third, that preschool educators have the knowledge but consider these narratives too complex for preschool aged children (Puskás & Andersson 2017).

Though this study does not address interpretations of the National Swedish Preschool Curriculum, I do believe this study has approached a clearer understanding of the other two factors Puskás and Andersson name as potential reasons for uncertainty amongst educators in regard to passing on cultural heritage that has a historically religious background (2017). Anna and Charvi confessed having little to no knowledge of some cultural narratives with religious backgrounds that were outside of their own personal experience. Magnus also noted a need to gain knowledge in certain areas in order to offer a curriculum that included the celebrations and traditions that were relevant for the children in his group. Kaia stated clearly that she does not think that these celebrations and traditions with religious narratives are too complex for preschool aged children, but rather felt limited by the understanding that she was not permitted to explore these subjects in a preschool setting.

8.1 Conclusions at a Larger Scale

Summarily this study has found six main factors in response to the two research questions. The first research question, ‘what specific factors are considered when an educator decides which traditions and celebrations s/he includes in the local curriculum?’ resulted in three factors. Concluding that the preschool’s administration, an educator’s particular group of children, and an educator’s personal knowledge are the three specific factors considered when an educator decides which traditions and celebrations to be included in the local curriculum. The second research question also identified three main factors answering the
question; ‘how does an educator take cultural celebrations and traditions into consideration when designing the curriculum for the classrooms?’ Further concluding that these three factors that an educator takes into consideration in reference to cultural celebrations and traditions are via conversation with their collegial group, recalling previous positive experiences, and active decision making.

Noting the overlapping themes of the six factors with regards to the results of an educator’s curriculum content decision making and the mode of decision making, or way in which an educator makes these decisions, three main areas of definition can be identified. That is, this case study finds, an educator’s curriculum content is affected by their administration, group, and knowledge. Where depending on the situation an educator will reference their collegial group or group of children. In an educator’s decision making s/he will call upon previous knowledge or experience of a celebration or tradition, or personal theoretically learned knowledge of a celebration or tradition.

**Figure 4:** Displays the main three factors affecting an educator’s curriculum content. Where an educator’s group and knowledge are each divided into two situation based subcategories.

These results indicate that if change in an educator’s curriculum content were to be achieved then change would need to be implemented at an administration level, a group level, or an educator’s knowledge would need to expand.

Within the entirety of this case study’s results there exists one instance where the interviewed educators were not in agreement. Through the theoretical focus of this case study, brought forth by Lévinas’ theory of the Other, a differencing of opinion emerged during Claudia’s and Anna’s interviews. Lévinas’ thoughts regarding the responsibilities one must take on in relation to the Other is understood in two polarizing ways by Claudia and Anna.
Claudia described her responsibility as an educator as teaching a curriculum that includes exclusively Swedish celebrations and traditions, seeing as she is an educator in Sweden. Where Anna lands on the opposite side of the spectrum, expressing her beliefs that her responsibility necessitates the teaching of those celebrations and traditions which are most relevant for the children in her group. Anna believes all the celebrations and traditions that each individual child has personal experience of should be acknowledged within her preschool curriculum. According to Anna, this is what it means to truly adhere to an intercultural pedagogical competence when working directly with a group of children; following which Anna states that she does not believe that her curriculum achieves this standard, and thusly she concludes that “[w]e do not live up to our mission…”.

Figure 5: Shows the polarized spectrum that this study has identified with regards to the correct curriculum content, with regard to celebrations and traditions, as described by the interviewed educators. Where the far left of this figure represents a curriculum exclusively including ‘Swedish Tradition’, and the far right of this figure represents a curriculum with ‘All Applicable’ celebrations and traditions.

Claudia’s opinion is represented by the far left of the spectrum identified in this study, which is ‘Swedish Tradition’ (Figure 5, s. 34). Anna’s opinion is represented by the far right in the above figure or ‘All Applicable’, as is depicted by the spectrum identified by this study (Figure 5, s. 34). The other interview respondents, from what I understand of the collected data, land somewhere along the line between including exclusively ‘Swedish Tradition’ and ‘All Applicable’ celebrations and traditions. That is, the terms left and right are, in this instance, only used to describe location within Figure 5 and how the interviewee’s responses relate relative to each other.

This polarization suggests that preschool educators at this particular preschool are not in agreement on the local curriculum content with regards to acknowledging celebrations and traditions. I would suggest that a discussion amongst preschool educators, regarding acknowledgement of traditions and celebrations, within the preschool should be conducted, if a consensus is desirable.
9 Continued Research

It would be of utmost interest to conduct this or a similar study on a much larger scale. If I were to conduct this study again I would enjoy the ability to include multiple preschools from across Sweden in the study, to see if the patterns and conclusions drawn here hold. I do believe the conclusions are applicable in other instances; however, to be sure further research is required.

Another direction in which to take this study in consideration of continued research would be to examine the effect parents have on the local preschool curriculum. Both with respect to how much power parents and guardians have in dictating what is and is not included in a preschool’s curriculum, but also what impression parents and guardians have regarding the celebrations and traditions acknowledged at their child’s preschool.

This study has not explored the potential consequences of acknowledging celebrations and traditions in a preschool environment with regard to the children’s creation of culture. What is the effect on children who acknowledge different celebrations and traditions at home compared to preschool? Do these children fall outside of what is the preschool’s “norm”? Are these children considered different by the other children within the group? These questions and more could provide the outline for continued research.
10 References


10.1 Unprinted Sources


Charvi, preschool educator. Interview 2018-11-07.

Claudia, preschool educator. Interview 2018-11-07.

Ide, preschool educator. Interview 2018-11-12.


Magnus, preschool educator. Interview 2018-11-17.
11 Appendices
I. Questionnaire

Enkät

Förskola: BMR

Grupp: Blå1/Blå2/Blå/Lila/Rosa/Röd/Gul/Grön/Turkos1/Turkos2/Turkos
Orange1/Orange2/Orange/Grå1/Grå2/Grå/Marinblå1/Marinblå2/Marinblå

Anställning: Förskollärare/Barnskötare

Antal barn i gruppen: 10/12/13/16/18/20/21/26/30/40

Vilka av följande högtider diskuterar ni eller fira i er verksamhet?

☐ Trettondedag jul ☐ Drakbåt festival
☐ Tjugondag jul ☐ Midsommar
☐ Uposatha ☐ Eid al-Fitr
☐ Fettisdagen ☐ Asalha Puja
☐ Kinesiska nytt åt ☐ Krishna Janmashtami
☐ Alla Hjärtans Dag ☐ Midhöstfestival
☐ Makha Bucha ☐ Rosh Hashanah
☐ Våffeldagen ☐ Skräpplockardagen
☐ Holi ☐ Yom Kippur
☐ Pesach ☐ Nalledagen
☐ Påsk ☐ FN dagen
☐ Qingming Festival ☐ Halloween
☐ Onam ☐ Alla helgons dag
☐ Valborgsmässoafton ☐ Diwali
☐ Vesakha ☐ Hannukkah
☐ Förskolans dag ☐ Advent
☐ Ramadan ☐ Lucia
☐ Eid al-Adha ☐ Sanghamitta dag
☐ Kristi himmelsfärd dag ☐ Jul
☐ Pingst ☐ Nyårsafton
☐ Sveriges nationaldag ☐ Övrigt
II. Interview guide

Intervju teman

Kan du berätta om din bakgrund?

Jag vill diskutera dina enkätsvar (har med som diskussionsunderlag)

Diskussion kring svaren

- Vem bestämmer vad?
  - Personlig värdering? Gruppen? Ledningen?
- Vad på listan anser du vara någonting barngruppen firar?
- Vad på listan anser du vara någonting barngruppen uppmärksammar på ett annat sätt än just firande?
- Varför ingår _____?
- Varför är _____ viktigt att uppmärksamma?
- Personlig erfarenhet?

Har du något mer att tillägga? / Du pratade mycket om ... ville du säga något mer om det?
Information and Consent Form

Eskilstuna, 15 oktober 2018

Information om undersökning av uppmärksammade högtider/firanden i förskoleverksamhet

Jag är student på det erfarenhetsbaserade förskollärarprogrammet vid Södertörns högskola. Denna sista termin på utbildningen skriver jag ett examensarbete som omfattar en mindre undersökning relevant för förskolans praktik och mitt kommande yrke som förskollärare. Studien kommer att handla om de högtider vi pedagoger uppmärksammar/firar i förskoleverksamheten.

För att samla in material till studien skulle jag gärna vilja besöka Er gruppen mellan den 17/10-8/11. Vid det första tillfället kommer jag att samla in era svar och vid ett senare tillfälle kommer jag att bjuda in ett antal personer till intervjuer.

Genomförandet av uppsatsen är reglerat av etiska riktlinjer som rör tystnadsplikt och anonymisering. Detta betyder att barnets, familjens, personalens och verksamhetens identitet inte får avslöjas. Det insamlade materialet aidentifieras och inga register med personuppgifter kommer att upprättas. Materialet kommer inte att användas i något annat sammanhang utan bara i det egna analysarbetet. Den färdiga uppsatsen kommer sedan att publiceras digitalt genom publikationsdatabasen DiVA.

Med detta brev vill jag be om Ert medgivande att deltaga i studien. All medverkan i studien är frivillig och kan avbrytas när som helst, även efter att materialinsamlingen har påbörjats. Om ni samtycker till studien fyller ni i bifogat formulär.

Kontakta gärna mig eller min handledare för ytterligare information!

Vänliga hälsningar,
Meredith Malloy
072-512 35 54
mmalloy@britishmini.se

Thomas Backlund
Södertörns högskola
08-608 45 42
thomas.backlund@sh.se
Formulär för samtycke till deltagande i studie.

Jag **samtycker** till att delta i studien.

Namn: ………………………………………………………………………………………………………

Namnunderskrift……………………………………………………………………………………..

Om Ni inte samtycker till att medverka i studien kan Ni bortse från detta brev.
### IV. Table 2

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