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Preschool teacher attrition

-A phenomenological analysis of five interviews with former preschool teachers

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Abstract

Title: Preschool teacher attrition – a phenomenological analysis of five interviews with former preschool teachers

Abstract: The Swedish early childhood education system is world renown for having one of the best child-centered educational curriculums, but retaining preschool teachers continues to be an issue. There are simply not enough preschool teachers to meet demands and as a result, Sweden cannot afford to lose any of the professionals that are currently working in the field. This study intends to investigate the question: What leads preschool employees to seek new employment opportunities? Five taped, semi-structured interviews with former preschool teachers and a phenomenological analysis of the gathered empirical data intend to provide insight to this question. Hopefully with this data it might be possible, with a few changes to the existing system, to entice some of these qualified, experienced preschool teachers back into the field. The results of the interviews seem to suggest that the preschool teachers are frustrated with the organizational factors of the preschool, whether it be lack of opportunities for professional development or unmanageable job duties stemming from perceived large child groups. This frustration seems to be in spite of general feelings of pride for the profession as a whole. These former preschool teachers tend to reason that guaranteed small child groups and opportunities for continued professional development could be the key to retaining qualified, experienced preschool professionals.

Keywords: Preschool, teacher, attrition, phenomenology

Titel: Förskollärare avhopp – en fenomenologisk analys av fem intervjuer med förskollärare som inte längre jobbar i förskolan

Abstrakt: Svenska förskolor är kända över hela världen för sin höga kvalitet, men att behålla erfarna förskollärare är en stor utmaning. Sverige har helt inte råd med att många utbildade förskollärare väljer att lämna yrket då det redan i dag finns för få utbildade förskollärare för att uppfylla myndigheternas krav. Studien ämnar undersöka vilka olika faktorer som påverkar förskollärares beslut att lämna yrket. Med fem inspelade, semi-strukturerade intervjuer med före detta förskollärare samt en fenomenologisk analys av data hoppas jag kunna ge en djupare förståelse för problemet och med några små förändringar av det nuvarande systemet hoppas jag kunna locka förskollärare tillbaka till yrket. Resultaten av intervjuerna pekar mot en upplevd frustration vad gäller organisatoriska faktorer på verksamhetsnivå. Detta beror delvis på få utvecklingsmöjligheter för lärare och delvis på orimliga krav på förskollärare som

tar hand om stora barngrupper. Upplevd frustration med organisatoriska faktorer står i kontrast mot stolthet över förskolläraryrket i sig. Förskollärarna i studien skulle komma tillbaka till yrket mot ett löfte om mindre barngrupper och kontinuerliga utbildningsmöjligheter prioriteras.

Sökord: Förskola, förskollärare, läraravhopp, fenomenologi

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Introduction

A 2011 prognosis from the Stockholm County Administrative Board (Länsstyrelsen i Stockholms län) suggests that by the year 2020 the demand for qualified preschool teachers will exceed the supply by 4400 teachers (WPS Group Sverige & Örtqvist 2011, p. 51). In order to meet growing demands, the local government has accepted 2000 more students in to teaching programs (Läraryrket 2013). “Sweden is implementing reforms to raise the status of the teaching profession by focusing on continuous professional development and launching a campaign to attract teachers” (Swedish Government 2011). But with many teachers currently dissatisfied with their current profession (OECD 2014) there is a great risk that demands will not be met and those who remain in the profession will experience more stress and less satisfaction. This is, of course, undesirable news for not only teachers but also society as a whole. Swedish taxpayers currently finance teacher education, and with fewer staying in the profession these costs add up. During the period of 2012 to 2014, 120 million Swedish kronor was allocated toward continuing education for preschool teachers currently working without qualifications (Swedish Government 2011). Stockholm’s municipality has been hit especially hard as many families move into the city increasing the demand for early childhood educators. As currently advertised on arbetsförmedlingen.se there are over 400 job vacancies within the various school systems in Stockholm alone – statistics from February 16, 2015 (Arbetsförmedlingen 2015). With all of these vacancies, it is absolutely imperative that schools work to retain the employees that they have. Sadly, many are leaving the profession. According to Richard M. Ingersoll, American attrition researcher,

“School staffing problems are not primarily due to teacher shortages, in the technical sense of an insufficient supply of qualified teachers. Rather, the data indicate that school staffing problems are primarily due to excess demand resulting from a “revolving door” – where large numbers of qualified teachers depart their jobs for reasons other than retirement” (Ingersoll 2001, p. 499).

With qualified teachers leaving the profession, there is a risk that, “If attrition exceeds the intake of the qualified recruits, these stayers may also find themselves working alongside those who fulfill the role of teachers although they do not have specific qualifications or commitment to the occupation” (Macdonald 1999, p. 841).

The conditions are not optimal for Stockholm city, which strives for a “world class preschool” (Stadsledningskontoret 2008). In order to actualize their mission the Swedish government has passed laws to elevate the quality of the preschool environment (Swedish

Government 2010). The new school law (SFS 2010:800), which went into effect on July 1, 2011 creates an important distinction between the role of the preschool teacher and the role of the preschool teacher assistant whereby the teachers are solely responsible for the adherence to the curriculum. Furthermore, from December 1, 2013 teachers who had previously been employed as “teachers” but who were not fully qualified were no longer entitled to permanent employment as a teacher. Starting from July 1, 2015 only fully qualified preschool teachers will be able to be responsible for the pedagogical aspirations of the preschool (SFS 2010:800. Chapter 2, Paragraph 13). The long-term results of this legislation hope to increase the status of the preschool teacher, but the immediate effects have been a shortage of qualified professionals. Where prior to 2011 a head teacher could deem an employee qualified due an education in a related field (such as another teaching degree, childhood psychology, or early childhood education programs from another country) now there is only one way to receive preschool teaching qualifications and that is through a bachelors of early childhood education from a Swedish university. People who had been working, as qualified preschool teachers for years are simply no longer qualified under the new regulations.

This study intends to look specifically at former preschool teachers and what factors lead them to seek employment outside of the preschool. The study will also focus on what aspects of the profession would need to change in order to entice professionals back into the schools. The data gathered intends to provide constructive insight that can lead to mitigating preschool teacher attrition.

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this study “attrition” will refer to teachers leaving the teaching profession prematurely for any other reason than retirement and “temporary attrition” will refer to teachers who leave the teaching profession for other reasons than parental leave and then return to the profession after some time.

Research Questions and Aims

The aim of this study is to identify the risk factors for preschool teacher attrition through exploring the following questions:

- What leads preschool employees to seek new employment opportunities?
- What would entice former preschool employees to return to teaching preschool?

The hypothesis of this study is that preschool employees living in Sweden seek new employment opportunities based on multiple factors many of which are common risk factors in other teaching fields.

Research on attrition

There is an abundance of international research focusing on teacher attrition. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (1990) attributes the majority of attrition to, “attractive openings in other occupations/industries when compared with the working conditions of teachers” (OECD 1990, see Macdonald 1999, p. 835), but the reality is that attrition is a complicated phenomenon systemic in the teaching profession. Not all attrition is permanent; there is some research to suggest that one-quarter of the people who leave the profession return at some time (Ingersoll 2001, p. 514).

The causes of attrition, according to the literature, can be broken down into three different categories: individual factors, organizational factors and societal factors.

Individual factors

There are several individual factors that have been shown to correlate to high incidences of teacher attrition. These factors include: minimal work experience (Kemmerer 1990), low teacher self-efficacy (Praetorius et. al 2014), low teacher satisfaction (Albert & Levine 1988), as well as the overall physical health of the teacher (Arbetsmiljöverket 2011).

Work experience

Regarding work experience, research suggests that young teachers who are fully qualified are more likely to leave the profession than other people with fewer qualifications but more experience (e.g. Murnane & Olsen 1989, see Macdonald 1999, p. 838). Further research into these early leavers suggests that there is a conflict between the theoretical teaching environment and the practical teaching environment. This is the unfortunate result of trying to speed up the teacher qualification process by eliminating much of the practical classroom work. These newly educated teachers begin their career without the skills needed to manage a classroom and often decided to leave the profession (Kemmerer 1990, p. 138). This research indicates that current teaching programs should place a high importance on practical experience. Such routines are standard practice in Swedish universities.

Teacher self-efficacy

Teacher efficacy, or the perceived ability of a teacher to achieve desired results, is another individual factor that is related to teacher attrition. Teachers who perceive themselves as less

likely to achieve educational goals are more likely to leave the profession (Praetorius et. al 2014, p. 380). Praetorius et. al's study indicates the importance of imposing realistic goals to track professional progress but cautions that unrealistic goals could correlate with teacher burnout.

Satisfaction

It may seem an obvious characteristic, but teachers who are more satisfied with their job are more likely to stay teaching. Grayson and Alvarez (2008) studied "teacher apathy" and concluded that, "a loss of enthusiasm for teaching, a desire to miss days of school, excessive stress, sense of disappointment and high levels of dissatisfaction in the workplace" (Grayson & Alvarez 2008, see Hancock & Scherff 2010, p 335) are potential warning signs of teacher attrition.

Overall health

According to a recent study conducted by the Swedish Teacher's Union (Läraryrket), preschool teachers are 80 percent more likely to suffer from psychological illnesses and 55 percent more likely be ill than the average worker (Läraryrket 2015, see Passanisi 2015). The Swedish Work Environment Authority (Arbetsmiljöverket) is suspicious that high incidences of illness in preschool employees are related to high stress levels, noise levels and physical demands on the body (Arbetsmiljöverket 2011). This data could lead to the conclusion that even if preschool teachers wished to continue teaching, there could be other factors that redirect them toward another profession. Specifically relating to stress, "An ILO-UNESCO Joint Committee (1994) reported on an international survey which revealed 25-33% of teachers suffered significantly from stress and they concluded that stress was a major issue for teachers and attrition" (ILO-UNESCO 1994, see Macdonald 1999, p. 838).

Organizational Factors

American attrition researcher Richard M. Ingersoll has identified four organizational conditions that are important indicators of how attached a person is to an organization, specifically, "the compensation structure for employees; the level of administrative support, especially for new employees; the degree of conflict and strife within the organization; and the degree of employee input into and influence over organization policies" (Ingersoll 2001, p. 506). According to Ingersoll, the more attached to an organization an employee is, the less likely they are to leave. The compensation structure for employees or low salary has often been reported as being a contributing factor for teacher attrition (Albert & Levine 1988, p. 53, Ingersoll 2001, p. 506). Albert and Levine's research has also drawn a correlation between

teacher salary and teaching satisfaction (Albert & Levine 1988, p. 53). In line with this research, the deputy director of education and skills at the OECD, Andreas Schleicher points out, “High performing education systems typically prioritize the quality of teachers, and everything associated with this salaries, and professional evaluation, over class size” (Sveriges Riksdag 2013, p. 30)

While salary is one important factor, administrative support is also important especially for new teachers (Wagner 1993, see Macdonald 1999, p. 844). The most current *Curriculum for the Preschool* emphasizes the importance of documentation and evaluation, which could lead Swedish preschool teachers to increase the amount of time spent working with administrative duties.

Societal factors

Albert & Levine’s research suggests that social status (as it pertains to a person of any given occupation) is determined by prestige and salary, which are in turn affected by supply and demand (Albert & Levine 1988, p. 51). As mentioned previously, with the supply of teachers decreasing and the demand increasing, it stands to reason that the social status of the preschool teacher is on the rise. This might be one bit of good news in an otherwise bleak situation. This study intends to investigate how the former teachers perceived their status in society as well as if their perception could have been a risk factor for leaving the preschool.

Conflicting thoughts on the impact of attrition

There are some researchers who advocate that stability at the cost of all else can be dangerous for schools as it can potentially inhibit positive change (Chapman 1994, see Macdonald 1999, p. 841). There is an active discussion around what is an appropriate amount of attrition. Some researchers, such as Ingersoll, suggest that there is a healthy amount of attrition that allows for bringing in enthusiasm and new ideas to an existing school organization (Ingersoll 2001, p. 505). Many researchers agree that excessive turnover (especially in underperforming schools) is not healthy for the students or the teachers who remain in the school (Ronfelt, Loeb & Wyckoff 2013, see Lindqvist, Nordänger & Carlsson 2014, p. 95). What is currently lacking from research is what exactly “healthy attrition” looks like and how it can be achieved.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework for this study is grounded in Edmund Husserl’s (1859-1938) phenomenology. Husserl developed the phenomenological school of thought in order to

counter the rationalist ideology of the 1800s. Prior to the 1800s the focus of research was on the natural sciences, namely physics, chemistry, biology and psychology but there was a lack of methodology for investigation into human sciences (Brinkkjaer & Høyen 2011, p. 61). The focus of phenomenology became an understanding how people experience the world, without taking it out of context or adding any judgment (Bengtsson 1988, p. 27). Husserl described the conscious experience as being directed at an object rather than being directed at consciousness itself (Brinkkjaer & Høyen 2011, p. 61, Bengtsson 1988, p. 28). Reflection in essence redirects experience toward consciousness and therein lays the true conscious experience. The focus of reflection is not to relive the conscious experience in relationship to the object, but rather to focus on how the experience influenced the consciousness (Brinkkjaer & Høyen 2011, p. 62).

Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) developed Husserl's school of phenomenology but was critical of the pursuit of true conscious experience. According to Merleau-Ponty, "the world exists before all analyses" (Bengtsson 1988, p. 69) and because of this, it is impossible to ignore the world in our quest for true analysis. For Merleau-Ponty people are born into a world filled with charged objects and these objects constantly influence navigation of the world.

Building on and interpreting Husserl and Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, Sara Ahmed (1969-) added the idea of the importance of orientation within phenomenology. True to Merleau-Ponty's object filled world, Ahmed suggests that we are continuously in the process of orientating ourselves toward objects or away from objects, as we seem appropriate in the context of our experiences. For Ahmed, Husserl's zero point of orientation becomes the reference point for experience. The orientation originates from, "zero point of orientation, the point from which the world unfolds and which makes what is 'there' over 'there'" (Ahmed 2006, p. 545). From zero point we are oriented toward an object by the process of habitual actions. As Ahmed states, "Orientations are about the directions we take that put some things and not others in our reach" (Ahmed 2006, p. 552). For the purposes of this study, I will look at what factors orient people toward the teaching profession as well as the factors that orient professionals in another direction.

Phenomenology as a research method

Since the founding of phenomenology as a research method in the 1800s, there have been many different perspectives that have developed from within the field. One such research method is discussed in the book *Vetenskapsteori för Lärarstudenter* by Ulf Brinkkjaer and

Marianne Høyen. According to Brinkkjaer and Høyen there are four phases stages of a phenomenologist research method: Epoch, phenomenologist reduction, variations of possible explanations and synthesis (Brinkkjaer & Høyen 2011, p. 70). The purpose of the first phase is to rid oneself of all preconceived notions and become open for new ideas and possibilities. The purpose of second stage is to describe the conscious experience in terms of the phenomenon. The purpose third stage is to search for themes that can explain the phenomenon. During the last phase, all of the previous three phases are integrated to form an understanding of the conscious experience surrounding the phenomenon.

Method

The core of this study consists of five taped, semi-structured interviews with preschool employees who have left the profession. Under optimal circumstances, observations would have also been analyzed as part of the method of this study. Because all of the interviewees had already moved on from the preschool environment, it was not possible to complement the interviews with observations. The entire focus of this study was upon the five interviews, which were analyzed from a phenomenological perspective. Three of the interview subjects I knew personally and two of the interview subjects I came in contact with through a fellow student. Prior to interviewing the five former preschool teachers, I tested the interview questions out on other preschool teachers, and some adjustments were made to allow for a smoother, more open interview (extra attention was made to adding the background information first and establishing a rapport with the interview subject). The interview questions were created with respect to previous research in the field, but extra caution was given to leave the questions open for interpretation and not give any illusions to preconceived notions or values. This was keeping with the phenomenological tradition. The interviews lasted from approximately 35 minutes to one hour and were recorded. During the course of the each interview I took notes so as to be able to ask follow-up questions when necessary. The interviewees were encouraged to speak on each subject for as long as they wished and at the end of the interview were prompted to fill in any information that was missed or could be important. It was especially important with those who had been away from the teaching field for some time that they were given the time to think through their answers and make corrections as they deemed appropriate. In the case of accessing memories from years ago, special attention was paid to the sentiments or feelings expressed through the stories rather than the absence or presence of small details. I was also able to underline reoccurring themes

throughout the interviews in my interview notes so that they could also be of use in the later analysis.

Directly after the interviews, I meticulously transcribed the conversations, listening to each recording multiple times. Once the final transcription was complete, the individual interviews were analyzed from a phenomenological perspective, following the methodology from the book *Vetenskapsteorier för lärstudenter* by Brinkkjaer & Høyen. I then looked for emotional themes throughout the interviews. Here notes were made regarding pauses in conversation, feelings, tones and word choice. The phenomenological analyses were then compiled to look for themes throughout all five interviews and then lastly the themes were summarized to what I feel to be one theme that runs throughout all five of the interviews.

Target population and sampling frame

Preschool employees who had left the preschool environment were the target population for this study. The sample consisted of five former preschool teachers who were not yet retired but continued to work in various professions. The interviewees were specifically chosen with the criteria of having worked as a qualified preschool teacher in a preschool that followed the Swedish curriculum. The interviewees were to have left the preschool profession before the age of retirement and pursued a career outside of the preschool. The former teachers range in age from early twenties to early sixties and have a wide variety of experience in the profession. The least amount of time spent as a qualified preschool teacher being less than one year and the most time being eighteen years.

Interview

The five in depth, semi-structured interviews were intended to insight on the potential causes of attrition. The interview questions were chosen with regard to previous research on the subject of attrition. The interviews focused on the experience of searching for new employment and the events that lead up to that decision. I allowed the interviewee to elaborate on any important topics and asked follow up questions when needed to provide in depth information. I found that the subject of the interviews was rather personal and therefore special attention was placed toward creating a safe, neutral environment for the interviewee by respecting the answers that were presented.

Ethical Considerations

Each individual received a letter of intent (attached in the appendix), which included the overall research plan, the aim of the research, the method, information regarding the principal investigator and information on how to discontinue participation in the study (CODEX 2015).

The participants were informed that the study was confidential and the schools were made anonymous. The participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time. This is in accordance with the January 2004 Act concerning the Ethical Review of Research Involving Humans (SFS 2003: 406) (CODEX 2015).

In addition to the letter that all participants received, the right to withdraw from the study at any time was reiterated at the beginning of each interview.

There were no anticipated risks associated with this study.

Results

First I will briefly present the interview subjects and their background in early childhood education; then I will present the results of the four stages of the phenomenological analysis. Although the data is presented in a rather linear fashion, during the analytical process there was constant reflection between all of the stages. There was not a clear distinction regarding where one stage stopped and the next stage began, but rather the stages flowed into one another.

All names have been changed to protect the interview subjects' identities.

Anna

Anna worked as a teacher's assistant (barnskötare) for five years before applying to an experience-based bachelors of early childhood education. She is currently on leave from her teaching position and is planning to leave teaching for another public service profession. She has already applied to university and intends to start studying in the autumn.

Britta

Britta received her bachelors of teaching 15 years ago from an English university, approximately 12 years ago she moved to Sweden where she taught in various schools and was the head teacher of an international preschool in Stockholm. After 10 years in the teaching profession, Britta decided to work at a research institute for mental health.

Caroline

Caroline worked as a teacher's assistant at a preschool for 15 years before applying for an experience based bachelors of early childhood education. After completing her degree, she continued to work as a preschool teacher for one year before deciding to work with older children.

Daniela

Daniela became a qualified preschool teacher in 1993 and she continued to work as a teacher until 2000. Since leaving the teaching field she works as an office administrator.

Elsa

Elsa worked in early childhood education for 23 years in total, 18 of which she worked as a qualified preschool teacher. During 2002 Elsa decided to work with older children and as of 2004, became a qualified special needs teacher. She is currently working in a primary school as a special needs teacher.

Phenomenological Analysis

Phase 1 - Epoch

During the first phase of the analysis, I tried to rid myself of the preconceived notions of the preschool teaching profession, which was incredibly difficult due to my ten years of experience in the preschool. I tried to distance myself from my own knowledge and experiences, and live through the interviews as though the stories were my own but without any of my history. There were many different perspectives from which to consider the interview data and I consciously tried to open my mind for new perspectives and ideas. The idea that an interviewee could be answering the research questions from the perspective of being a teacher, leader, parent, caregiver, fellow human were just some of the perspectives that I considered when taking a first look at the interview data. The result is that, while the interview subjects had a similar educational background, the actual experiences that they described were very different in many aspects but did show some common themes. It became important in my continued analysis of the interviews to distance myself from the notion that the responses were directly related to a job title (or educational degree) but rather to the human experience.

Phase 2 – Phenomenological reduction

The second phase of analysis resulted in the emergence of several possible trends and an overwhelming evidence of passionate emotions such as: pride, joy, disappointment and resentment. These emotions came from various passages of all interviews. I began to look at the interview themes (such as: background, advantages and disadvantages of working in the preschool, salary, status etc.) in order to track the development of the emotional themes.

Background

The first interview question was designed to gather background information from the interviewee; and a summary has been presented in the introduction to the interview subjects. The majority of the information from the first question seemed to be more a rehearsed citation of the interviewee's qualifications. I found the answers to be generally speaking very straight forward and ambivalent. What was worth noting from a phenomenological standpoint was

how the interviewee experienced the orientation toward a career as a teacher. Britta describes her decision to become a teacher with the following,

“When I was in sixth form, which is like gymnasium, I decided that I wanted to work with children and I’d done lots of kind of school activity groups for younger kids and brownies which is like a scout program. So I had qualifications which is like certificates to work with kids but I decided that I wanted to become a teacher so I did a four year bachelors degree in education.”

In terms of Britta orienting toward a teaching career it was an accumulation of her desire to work with children. For a deeper understanding of Britta’s orientation toward a teaching career, I considered Ahmed’s thoughts regarding the tendency to orient as being a product of many experiences. In Ahmed’s words, “These tendencies are not originary; they are effects of the repetition of ‘tending toward’” (Ahmed 2006, p. 553).

In a similar manner, Daniela expressed that she was looking for a career change after the birth of her children when she decided to pursue preschool teaching. Once again, I see the application of Ahmed’s thoughts that orientation is not one event but rather the continuous interest that pushes one forward. The birth of Daniela’s children sparked an interest in working with children that then lead to her pursuing a teaching career.

In summary, with regards to the backgrounds, all interviewees had some experience working with children before actively pursuing a career in early childhood education whether it be working as a teaching assistant, volunteer work or having children at home.

Advantages and Disadvantages

The second theme was divided in to two parts, the first of which regarding the advantages of working in the preschool and the second regarding the disadvantages of working in the preschool. Most interviewees felt that working with children was the biggest advantage to working in the preschool. According to Daniela, “The advantage of working in a preschool was that it was incredibly enjoyable to be with the children. It is so incredibly stimulating to be with children all day: how they think, their culture, to be out in nature.” There is a notion of the romanticism in Daniela’s description of the preschool teacher especially in regards to the time spent with children. In my opinion, all interviewees tended to give responses that they deemed to be socially acceptable – talking about children in an angelic, positive manner. Another such example comes from the interview with Britta, “that kind of buzz that you get when it really works, and it really clicks and you make a difference, you can’t get that anywhere else” alludes to her experience of the importance of teacher efficacy. Caroline states, “Every day is fantastic when you work with children, to be there and watch them

develop before your eyes is incredibly rewarding. I still feel that way to this day. No two days are alike.” I feel that this could be interpreted as the interviewee attempting to establish a connection with the interviewer by acknowledging a common ground and giving answers that are generally enjoyable to hear. This will be revisited as later in the interviews many interviewees sometimes frustrating, exhausting and intense aspects of working with young children.

The negative aspects of the job varied from the bureaucracy and administrative duties to size of the child groups. Four out of five interviewees felt that being responsible for large child groups was a negative aspect of working in the preschool. According to Anna, “The negatives are: large child groups and all of the expectations that are placed on teachers today.” Following up on that idea Anna refers directly to pedagogical documentation as one of the causes of the extra burden on teachers, “It is impossible to meet all of the job’s requirements, and one requirement that just continues to grow is pedagogical documentation. There is just simply not enough time to meet all of the demands so it becomes at the cost of the children. There is not enough time to be with the children and do all of the administration.” I attributed Anna’s statement as conveying feelings of inadequacy, and stress as well as an overall lack of control of her own situation. She mentions that the demands of the job continue to increase and there is a feeling that this is a fact that she must accept. Along these lines Britta mentions the amount of energy that is required to be a teacher, “I just feel like it took too much energy from me. Having a child at home and going back to working with students.” I think that for Britta what is important in this quote is that she is coming from the perspective of mother and teacher (for the first time in her career) and potentially the demands at home and at school lead her to feel both exhausted and inadequate. For Daniela the negative aspects were due to the decline in the municipality’s budget for supporting preschools. “There were huge budget cuts, and the municipality’s economy continued to worsen. The child groups became bigger and bigger. We had 24 children between the ages of two and five and we were 2.75 teachers to 24 children.” This is once again an indication of feelings of lack of control or helplessness over the situation.

In summary the data suggests that the advantages elicited romanticized feelings of pride and joy whereas the disadvantages elicited feelings of helplessness, inadequacy and exhaustion. The advantages of being a preschool teacher were primarily related to working with children and the disadvantages were often related to administrative duties and the physical demands of caring for a large child group.

Salary

Questions regarding salary in general tend to express a feeling of ambivalence from the interviewees. Britta, Caroline and Daniela go as far as to say leaving the preschool had "absolutely nothing to do with salary" and in fact most of the interview subjects stated that they were aware of the salaries in the preschool teaching profession prior to becoming teachers and thus, it was exactly as they had expected. In the case of Anna, she mentions that an increased salary was a motivational factor for applying to get her preschool teaching qualifications and now that she is qualified, she is satisfied with her salary. Elsa mentions that while she would not consider salary as a motivating factor for leaving the preschool, she did experience a greater opportunity for salary increases in primary school, which was overall positive in her case.

One frustration that Britta expresses regarding salary is how she perceives it to be unfair that teachers of older children are often better compensated despite having a more limited educational background.

"I was also kind of frustrated here and also actually in the UK, where working with the younger students where you have to have a lot more pastoral responsibility and a broader subject knowledge and a lot more...I think it benefits, I mean I had a lot of childhood psychology in my teaching degree. And I think it really benefits thinking about how children behave and work together and function. You need a lot of those skills when you work with younger children and yet you get paid less, than a sixth form teacher who doesn't have so much mentoring and has only one subject. You can kind of come in and out...teach their subject and leave. Whereas when you work with younger students, you're a lot more, involved in the whole child and the whole school process but you get paid less money. I guess that really frustrates me.

In her own words Britta lifts the theme of frustration while simultaneously expressing pride in her chosen profession.

In summary most (four out of five people) feel generally ambivalent in terms of salary and one person feels frustrated that the amount of effort and energy needed to be a preschool teacher is not reflected in the amount for which they are compensated when compared to other teaching professions.

Status

When asked if the social status of the preschool teacher could have been a contributing factor in leaving the profession Daniela states, "No, it was not. I was proud to be a preschool teacher. I can't imagine a more idyllic profession – working with young children." Once again

the themes of pride and a positive contribution to society arise. Caroline expressed similar sentiments, "No, I don't think so, because I meet many people who say that it is such an important job and to be honest, I haven't ever heard anyone speak negatively about the preschool teaching profession." Britta is a bit more cautious with her answer, "It wasn't a factor in changing. But it... people...people don't think you're that great if you're a primary teacher. I mean if you were to say you worked in IT, or even if you were a nurse, I think people would have more respect." What is interesting is that Britta mentions status in terms of respect from other members of society. Her statement is worded in a very personal manner whereby her status as a preschool teacher becomes the equivalent of her status as a member of society. This could indicate that Britta herself sees her role as a teacher as a defining characteristic of herself. Anna expressed a similar perspective; "I value teaching more than anything but society doesn't value it as much. They feel that we just play, eat and sleep with the children, but it is much more than that. We inspire children to develop and set the foundation for their learning." This is at the center of the issue for Anna, a contrast between how she herself perceives the profession in contrast with how society perceives the profession. This notion can create an internal conflict in the way in which she perceives her experiences as a preschool teacher.

For Elsa status was more of an issue when she left the preschool and began to work in a primary school,

"When I started to work in the primary school and I was the only preschool teacher amongst fully qualified primary school teachers, I could sometimes feel that I had a lower status. I would compare myself to the others I worked with and I assumed that they were more qualified because they had primary teaching qualifications. They never said anything negative to me or questioned my abilities, but it was a feeling that I had. Because of this I decided to go back to school to become a special needs teacher"

This is an interesting thought process because three of the five interviewees have gone on to work in the primary schools. There is an essence of feelings of disappointment when it comes to Elsa in terms of her social status.

In summary, most people were proud to work as preschool teachers despite an acknowledgement of a lower social status. Furthermore, leaving the profession was not directly related to society's perception of the preschool teaching profession but there was a disconnect between how important the profession is to the teachers and how important the profession is to other members of society.

Working environment

Group size

For four out of five of the interviewees, the issue of group size was a very important topic. In the words of Caroline,

”The only problem was that there were large child groups, so one couldn’t keep up. I was never very satisfied with the work that I put in there. I couldn’t just give and give to everyone I wanted to. And I told this to the head teacher, but the head teacher said that she was satisfied with the job I was doing. It was I who wasn’t satisfied with my work. I constantly had a guilty conscience for not being able to accomplish more.”

I think that more important for Caroline than the actual size of the group were her feelings of inadequacy in meeting all of the individual needs of the children as well as what she perceived to be the demands of the head teacher. And while the head teacher was not concerned with her performance, Caroline seemed to be disappointed with herself. Daniela also expressed feelings of inadequacy in relation to large groups, “If a teacher was ill in another department of the school we got their children also. It wasn’t uncommon for us to have fifteen children at three o’clock when the second to the last person went home for the day. The parents would come to collect their children at that time, and there was a lot to do.” A very vivid description of exactly how much there was to do comes from Daniela,

”I remember the exact moment I decided to leave teaching because I was alone and there were eight people who wanted something at the same time and there was a parent who stood in the door with an important reminder about their child... and then the telephone rang, two children sat in the bathroom waiting for help, there were two children who started getting angry with one another and were about to start fighting, and there was a child who had a foot stuck in the sofa. At that moment, I thought, there are eight people who want something... and I felt like, I can’t continue like this.”

For Daniela the feelings of inadequacy ring true, but these feelings are rooted in not being able to sustain her efforts to meet the increasing demands. The last sentence of the quote expresses a bit of fear at the chance that her career might continue (indefinitely) in this manner. There is a sense of hopelessness in her quote with regards to her situation. She is well aware of her inability to continue under such undesirable circumstances, but her only option is to leave teaching – rather than constructively try to address the circumstances. In terms of Ahmed’s notion of orientation as it pertains to Daniela’s decision to leave the teaching field, I

feel that it is the, “role of repeated and habitual actions in shaping bodies” (Ahmed 2006, p. 544) that drove Daniela away from the teaching profession. While Daniela attributes her decision to leave teaching to one specific moment, it is entirely probable that it was the routine of this helplessness that oriented her in a different direction.

In summary, large child groups seem to awaken feelings of inadequacy, hopelessness, guilt and disappointment.

Leadership

Generally speaking, most people indicated that school leadership was supportive of preschool teachers. In the words of Anna, “The head teacher often stands between the teachers and parents and because she works in the child group with us every day, she fights for us when there is a problem.” Elsa also felt that, “I always felt supported by the head teachers throughout the entire time I taught in the preschool.” But there were two interviewees who were a bit more critical of the role of leadership in the preschool. According to Britta,

“You can just go about teaching classes and doing your own thing, but if the general atmosphere isn’t working and if decisions are being made above your head that you just have to go along with that you don’t really understand or that they haven’t discussed with the staff through, it creates a really bad feeling. And also if you’re not valued by the management and they’re just looking for profit and money, I find that very hard to stomach in education. It shouldn’t be for profit, that’s not what it’s about.”

For Britta there seems to be a conflict of interests for the head teachers who focus on money. From Britta’s perspective, salary was of no importance to her when choosing a job in the teaching field and perhaps she feels as though the monetary aspect of working in the preschool should not be relevant to the management either. She does not leave the option for management to both value the employees and a financial profit. For her it seems to be a question of priorities, where one is naturally more important than the other. There is also a desire for communication and understanding between management and employees. The other interviewee who specifically mentioned management as playing a significant role in her decision to leave the preschool teaching field is Daniela. According to Daniela, if school leadership could have provided more manageable groups, “I believe that I would still be teaching at that school today.” There seems to be a disappointment in Daniela’s view of leadership, it is almost as if she feels that there was more that management could have done, but decided against. This in turn could be perceived as resentment.

“Everyone can’t be friends with everyone especially in a large school, but if there’s, if it’s divisive and you get little factions or groups and management aren’t doing anything to counteract that then you’re sort of at risk for those problems. That’s a massive factor for teachers leaving education and certainly the year I left the second school over here that was the main factor that people weren’t happy with the management – who were actively dividing people into groups which is absolutely ridiculous.”

In summary, when leadership is supportive of preschool teachers it tends to evoke feelings of accomplishment but when leadership is unsupportive of preschool teachers it can lead to experienced inadequacy, helplessness and resentment.

Collaboration with colleagues

For the most part the experience working with colleagues was positive. In the words of Daniela, “When it comes to team meetings, preschool meetings were the best. I’ve never had a job since that had such a democratic an open environment - when it came to making decisions and the following them.” Anna also supports this notion, “I’m very lucky, everyone that I work with isn’t scared of conflicts; we deal with everything as it comes.” I think that the overall feeling is a sense of pride in one’s professionalism. The ability to admit that there are problems that need to be dealt with but there are measures in place for dealing with problems and paths toward resolution. For Caroline however, teacher attrition was a draining experience that made group cohesion nearly impossible,

”There were so many teachers who got burned out, and that made it difficult for everyone. Then there came new substitute after new substitute after new substitute. And then each time you get a new group it takes half of a year to get to know everyone and for the group to be cohesive. And then as soon as someone leaves, the process starts all over again...there was also permanent relocations because someone would quit or be on sick leave. There was never a calm moment. ”

Caroline’s description of her working environment seems once again to liken hopelessness. It’s not necessarily the working environment during this particular moment that would lead her to quit, but rather the notion that this situation is out of her control and will continue indefinitely.

For Elsa, cooperation amongst the teaching team was a multifaceted issue,

”It’s often not the premises that is the problem. From what I’ve experienced it is the psychosocial environment. How your colleagues treat you can be difficult sometimes. If the teaching team works well it reflects directly in the child group. That is

much more important than a nice building. The foundation is a healthy team atmosphere”

The psychosocial work environment was of greater importance than the physical premises in Elsa’s experience. The theme that becomes apparent in Elsa’s statement is that healthy relationships are more important than material goods (the environment) and this was something that she hoped to pass on to the children.

In summary, how the stayers experience attrition can be described as stressful but where teaching teams are stable, personnel issues did not seem to be a significant factor for teacher attrition.

Teacher Satisfaction

All interviewees enjoyed their role as a preschool teacher. According to Caroline job satisfaction was, “absolutely not a factor in my decision to change jobs. I had my education behind me and felt confident with the children and parents.” This is a sentiment reinforced by both Britta and Daniela. According to Britta, “The actual process of teaching and being with the students more than anything else, that’s what gives you the job satisfaction.” A phenomenological analysis could conclude that themes of pride, joy and a sense of accomplishment characterize the responses to questions regarding teacher satisfaction. There were two interviewees who noted that while they were satisfied with their role as a preschool teacher they were anxious for change. According to Elsa, “after 15 years that I wanted to challenge myself professionally.” Anna, who also enjoyed the preschool teaching profession, felt that once she has small children of her own she will no longer want to work with small children professionally, “To be challenged by children at preschool and then come home and take care of my own children... it feels like, it would just be too much.” Anna later states that she would prefer to work part-time in the office and part-time in the child group but she wishes that there were a position for her. In her own words, “There are really only three different jobs in the preschool: teaching assistant, teacher and head teacher. There should be something between teacher and head teacher.” I attributed her feelings of dissatisfaction to a lack of opportunities for career advancement.

In summary, while all people expressed a sense of pride and satisfaction in their work, some grew tired of the roles the profession has to offer.

Health

For Daniela, health could have been a factor in her decision to leave teaching,

“When you have so many children... and you are 2 teachers in a cloakroom with 24 children. 24 overalls for two people, 24

pairs of rain pants. I remember that I had a horrible pain in my hands. I remember that there were special places where the children could stand so that we wouldn't have to bend (and hurt our backs) but, absolutely, the physical pain is a factor when you have so many children.”

Daniela's statement in regards to her physical wellbeing also sheds light on her sense of helplessness and inadequacy. Interview notes indicate a tone of resigned acceptance when she describes the cloakroom situation at the notion of living with pain. It was simply understood that there would be two teachers in the cloakroom with 24 children and the pain that Daniela experienced was hers alone. It is as though Daniela understands that management tried to make the process as painless as possible with the “special places where children could stand” but that their measures fell short and there was nothing more to be done. I find it particularly interesting that Daniela chose to add, “when you have so many children” to the end of her statement. It is as though Daniela expected a small amount of pain, but it became unbearable with so many children. Also alluding to helplessness and inadequacy, Britta states, “There are so many demands on you, so many expectations. Mentally and physically. I think that unfortunately that is a reason people leave the profession.” Here Britta goes on to describes burnout,

“I remember when I first started teaching, full of energy and, no kids at home, really brimming with ideas despite the tricky year I had when I started teaching, There were sort of teachers there who were in their 40s or 50s and they were burnt out, just ground down and I sound really naïve, but I look back and I completely understand why they were like that. It's the way the culture of teaching is at the moment, it's not a degree you can have for life and stay healthy. A job you can have for life and stay well... if you want to do a good job. You can sit there and feel crap and half teach but you're not doing the students justice if you do that. You're not doing yourself justice if you do that. But the way education is currently set up, it is so draining.”

Similar feelings of inadequacy were also described by Caroline,

“Because I had worked at the same place for so long, it was my job to fix everything. I had colleagues who were supposed to share the burden, but they didn't. I didn't have the energy to do everything and at the same time, I wanted to do a good job, but I just didn't have the time, not even working overtime.”

A phenomenological analysis of the aforementioned three quotes leads to an uncovering of the themes of loneliness, helplessness and inadequacy. In the case of all three of these

interviewees, this is a huge disconnect from the previously mentioned themes of personal joy and contentment. For Caroline, the blame was on the school leadership. “School leadership didn’t take care of the teachers. There was never enough staff, and the child groups were huge” the thought that there was nothing that Caroline could do to change the situation is a further affirmation of the helplessness theme.

New employment – a reorientation of sorts

In the words of Ahmed, “The objects that we direct our attention toward reveal the direction we have taken in life” (Ahmed 2006, p. 546). For these five interviewees, this means a direction away from the preschool and toward other career opportunities.

Anna has applied to a university program in another public service field that is not teaching. She is still undecided if this is the right move for her, but after eight years in the same profession she is anxious to try something new.

Two of the interviewees (Caroline and Elsa) are currently working in primary schools. Caroline in particular feels that the primary school places a greater importance in making sure that employees are well taken care of, “there is a sense of urgency to replace people who are ill because we have achievement goals to meet.” Sometimes recourses are needed to “ensure a calm environment so that the staff have the energy to stay teaching.” Elsa found it particularly advantageous to have long summer holidays to recuperate from a stressful working environment.

Daniela and Britta are currently working in an office environment where in the words of Britta, “it is easier to leave a computer when your children are ill than it is to leave a group of children.” There is a sense that in Britta and Daniela’s case that these new careers prevent feelings of inadequacy by inherently having fewer responsibilities.

The overall trends here are anxious excitement at new opportunities, or desire toward a career with less responsibility.

Return to preschool teaching?

When asked what they missed from the preschool world, Caroline stated, “Even if we have a (cooperative atmosphere) now (in the primary school), it is not the same as it was. We don’t hang out the way that we used to at the preschool. There was a desire to get to know one another at preschool since we always worked as a team.” I think that this shows the importance of comradery especially when a group of people has been through a difficult situation together. For Caroline, I feel that the positive feelings that she had to her former colleagues was the result of a shared history, and she is potentially worried that she will not grow as close to any of her current colleagues. Three of the interviewees mentioned that they

miss working closely with young children, but for Daniela she felt that spending time with her grandchildren was a wonderful substitute.

When asked if they could imagine returning to the profession all but one said yes. For Anna the leave from teaching seemed to be temporary, “I can definitely see myself returning to the profession. But when I have small children of my own, I don’t think that I’ll be able to dedicate myself to being a good teacher so I’d rather pursue something else.” Britta has hopes of going back, but in a different role, “I think if I was to go back to teaching I’d be a bit more specialized about it. So I’d choose a certain style of school I’d teach in or a certain style of teaching like play therapy or something, or working with kids that have a special need, rather than just a mainstream school with a mainstream class.”

For three out of the five interviewees, returning to the field would be considered under one certain guarantee: smaller, more manageable child groups. According to Britta, “In terms of the job, being guaranteed that I could have reasonable size groups. I wouldn’t really want a job where I was taking on a big class of students on a routine basis. That for me is not so fun. That’s not how I enjoy teaching. So, guaranteed smaller groups.” Caroline’s statement follows along the same lines, “Smaller child groups, I believe, and leadership that prioritizes their employees.”

Anna stressed the importance of possibilities for career development, “If I was able to work part-time in the office and part-time with the children, but not only with the children.”

Another aspect that was important to both Anna and Elsa was the advantage of long summers and teacher holidays, “I mean I’ve considered it because my children are going into the school system as well, so being tied to the same routine as them if you like, the same term times, the same holiday times, that’s enticing.”

The trend here seems to be that the teachers would take some ownership over the job responsibilities before their return; this would potentially mitigate the feelings of helplessness and inadequacy.

Phase 3 – Variations of possible explanations

There were many ways in which to interpret the data from the interviews, and as I poured over them countless times, it became apparent to me that there was an inherent structure within the data. By analyzing the emergent trends from each of the research questions, on an emotional continuum there were suddenly three different types of emotions. On one side there were positive emotions such as: pride and joy. In the middle there was ambivalence. And then on the other side there were the negative emotions such as inadequacy and hopelessness.

Generally speaking the feelings of pride and joy were in relation to working with the children or colleagues whereas the feelings of inadequacy and hopelessness were in relation to routines decided by the school leadership. Ambivalence was related to salary. As the empirical data suggests, none of the teachers would have left the teaching field if there was a way in which to constructively deal with their negative feelings within the school organization, though to be fair, the negative feelings might not have been a direct result of the organization's wrongdoings (but rather perceptions on behalf of the teachers).

In order to gather a deeper understanding as to what could be the cause of some of the emotional themes, I reconsidered many of the events from the perspectives mentioned during the Epoch phase (teacher, mother, leadership, human experience etc.). Where could the frustration for large groups come from? Is it possible that the frustration with large child groups could stem from a romanticized notion of the childhood? The traditional family unit consists of two parents and one to several children. There is the possibility that the interviewees wished that this type of environment could be simulated in the preschool. The frustration could also stem from the comparisons to one's own childhood. Could the problem with large child groups come from being a parent and seeing the environment through what would be best for a particular child?

What seemed to rest at the core of all of the problems was the idea that these feelings were not adequately addressed at the management level which resulted in the preschool teachers believing that attrition was the only solution.

Phase 4 – Synthesis

The sum of the overall trends uncovered in this analysis amount to a **frustration** stemming from a dichotomy of emotions. On the one hand the perhaps romanticized, idyllic notion of the joy and pride of working with small children and on the other hand the feelings of inadequacy and resentment stemming from the organizational factors prohibiting the actualization of the true potential the preschool teaching profession has to offer. In the case each interview session, the decision to leave the profession amounted to an increased frustration in the current situation and helplessness in the ability to rectify the situation. For two out of the five interviewees the frustration was primarily due to a lack of opportunities for professional development and for the remaining three interviewees the frustration was primarily due to unmanageable job expectations as a result of perceived large child groups.

Discussion

This study provides support for many of the themes addressed in earlier research on teacher attrition. While there are many commonalities between teacher attrition and preschool teacher attrition, there are some aspects of teaching that are unique to working in the preschool environment.

Unique to the preschool teaching profession is the variability of the working environment. Some teachers reported manageable child groups of six children to one teacher where others expressed a ratio of 24 children to two teachers. With no concrete guidelines to follow, school management is left with the daunting task of interpreting the *Curriculum for the Preschool* to the best of their abilities, which results a wide range of working conditions. Two of the preschool teachers interviewed in this study worked in groups of 24 children and two teachers - nearly the same size as a primary school classroom but with much younger children. Other factors that contribute to stress and exhaustion are shorter vacation times and fewer childfree hours (when compared to primary school teachers).

As far as the similarities between teaching and preschool teaching, individual factors, organizational factors and societal factors all play a role in attrition. The results of this study conclude that the most significant factor in preschool teacher attrition is the organizational factors of the preschool specifically how management deals with complaints from the teachers.

Individual factors

When it comes to individual factors, all of the interviewees stated that they enjoyed their job as a preschool teacher. Physical and mental health, however, could have been a contributing factor for three out of five of the interviewees. The problems with physical health were attributed to large group sizes while the problems with mental health stemmed from an overwhelming list administrative duties. This seems to support the research of Wagner (1993) on increased administrative duties as an attrition risk factor (Wagner 1993, see Macdonald 1999, p. 844). What is an interesting dimension to this is not the extra administrative duties, but rather the conditions under which teachers are expected to achieve their administrative goals. This study suggest that the individual factors, particularly those that are suspected to be correlated with attrition, are intertwined with organizational factors and it is the combination that proves to be especially difficult on teachers.

Organizational factors

There are some organizational factors that had little to no effect on the interviewees in the study. None of the former preschool teachers indicated that salary could have been a contributing factor in their decision to leave the profession. These results could be due to the fact that four out of the five of the interview subjects had previous teaching experience before receiving their teaching degrees, so the salary that they received was in line with their expectations. In fact, two of the interviewees left their jobs as preschool teachers to pursue less paid positions elsewhere. This is in opposition to Albert & Levine's (1988) study suggesting that employees are likely to leave a current position for better compensation (Albert & Levine 1988, p. 53). But it is worth noting that salary was a motivational factor for at least two teachers to continue their education (and become fully qualified). It did come up in several interviews that the preschool teachers felt that their salaries were relatively low in comparison to teachers in other fields; this could correlate with the perceived lower status of the preschool teacher in relation to teachers in other fields.

In general most interviewees stated that they had experienced support from the school leadership but in cases where leadership was lacking or absent, it was a significant factor in attrition. Teachers who did not feel confident in leadership's abilities to resolve conflicts sought other employment (and eventually left the field altogether). There was special attention drawn to circumstances where the teachers were expected to be responsible for large child groups and the negative impact that it had on the psychological and physiological wellbeing of the teachers in question. There was also a frustration over lack of substitute teachers and leadership's abilities to provide support when needed. What is interesting is that none of the teachers in this study sought out a leadership position within the preschool before deciding to leave the profession. So while strong leadership and support are important characteristics for a successful preschool, not everyone is prepared or willing to lead.

Societal factors

In response to the questions focusing on the status of the preschool teacher the data does not suggest a correlation with attrition. What is interesting is that several of the interviewees have since gone on to work in the primary school where they perceived the status to be higher than that of the preschool teacher. This could support research by Albert & Levine (1988) that people leave the teaching profession for other higher status professions. Teachers looking to increase their salary, status and prestige need not look further than primary school. This study draws attention to the need for more research into the status of teachers and whether preschool teachers are leaving the field to pursue higher status teaching professions.

What leads preschool employees to seek new employment opportunities?

There is not one factor alone that is responsible for preschool teachers leaving the field. Attrition can be attributed to undesirable routines at the organizational level that reorient teachers away from the profession. Unwanted routines are primarily the result of organizational factors, specifically the “level of administrative support... and the degree of employee input into and influence over organizational policies” (Ingersoll 2001, p. 506). These specific organizational factors have a negative impact on the teacher’s individual wellbeing which in turn affects society as a whole.

Passionate, dedicated professionals are often able to find work in related teaching fields, as was the case for two of the interview subjects, which makes an easy transition away from the preschool.

What would entice former preschool employees to return to teaching preschool?

In order to re-entice teachers back into the preschool it would require some resources put towards reorganization. The general trend among the responses was that preschool teachers would return to teaching if smaller, more manageable child groups were guaranteed and there were clear paths for career development.

There is no way of predicting the future with certainty, but all of the interviewees indicated that they would consider returning to the preschool. This could mean that the attrition reported in this study is more a case of temporary attrition than permanent attrition from the teaching field. It is interesting to note that while previous American research suggests that many women leave the teaching field to raise children (Huberman 1993, see Macdonald 1999, p. 838) but then come back when their children are older, this is not exactly the case in Sweden. While several of the women interviewed in this study left the profession while their children were small, they continued to work, but in other professions. The general feeling was that it would be too intense to be surrounded by small children daily both at home and at work. Simply stated, it could be the stressful, intense nature of the job that leads people away from the profession (if even temporarily) rather than the need to focus on child-rearing at home.

Conclusions

Qualified preschool teaching professionals with a passion for their career are leaving the preschool despite efforts to increase social status and salary of the profession. The former preschool teachers interviewed in this study valued their contribution to society but experienced a frustration over the systematic organizational problems that plague the

preschool. The efforts of the Swedish government to increase the social status of teachers through educational expectations and salary increases do not seem to have made a positive impact in the case of the preschool teachers interviewed in this study. While teachers appreciate increases in salary, they do not seem to be adequate in attrition prevention. This study suggests that in order to retain experienced, qualified professionals, the school law and curriculum should address organizational factors that lead to dissatisfaction amongst preschool teachers. There is a need for formal communication between preschool teachers and their employers about what job environment is acceptable (specifically how many children there should be in each group) and what routines there are for teachers to express dissatisfaction in a constructive manner to encourage change. This would decrease the cognitive disconnect between the potential of the preschool environment and the practical reality of the environment. If teachers were made aware of the expectations regarding group sizes before joining the profession, it would give both employers and teachers a reference point for discussions and evaluation. Teachers who dare to reflect on the shortcomings of the profession are invaluable in providing insight into ways in which the profession can develop and their concerns should be taken seriously.

Furthermore as many of the preschool teachers interviewed in this study have gone on to teach in other fields, concerns regarding the low status of preschool teachers in comparison to other teaching fields must also be addressed. Many teachers left the preschool because of a frustration that the preschool environment did not live up to the true potential that the field has to offer. It was also noted that many teachers who have gone on to teach in other professions placed a high value on longer vacation times as an opportunity to recuperate from an intense working environment.

In short, increasing salary and social status are simply a stepping-stone in what appears to be a much-needed overall of the preschool teaching profession. This research highlights the importance of honoring the criticisms of the profession in order to better understand the phenomenon of attrition.

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Appendix

Letter of intent to interview

(First in English, following in Swedish)

Hello,

My name is Sarah Lindahl and I am currently studying Early Childhood Education at Södertörns University. As I reach the end of my teaching program I have decided to write my final essay on factors that lead preschool teachers to leave the teaching profession. My hope is to gain a deeper understanding of the issues that lead teachers to quit in order to prevent problems in the future. I would love for all who have a desire to teach preschool to remain dedicated to the profession!

I will interview several people who have left the teaching profession. I would be grateful if you could answer some questions which could take up to an hour.

All of the material from the interviews will only be used for the purposes of this study and you and your school will be completely anonymous. If you should, at any time, regret your decision to take part in this study, your answers will be immediately removed from the study. You are welcome to read the finished study in May.

Sincerely,
Sarah Lindahl

Brev inför intervjun

Hej,

Sarah Lindahl heter jag och jag är förskollärostudent på Södertörns högskola. Jag går nu min sista termin på programmet och skriver mitt examensarbete om faktorer som leder till att förskollärare vill lämna yrket. Min hopp är att kunna erkänna en djupare förståelse för det som präglar förskollärares arbete med syfte på att motverka eventuella bekymrar. Jag vill gärna att alla som brinner för arbetet är kvar i yrket!

Jag kommer att intervjua några som har lämnat yrket. Jag skulle vara tacksam om ni kunde besvara några frågor vilket kan ta upp till en timme.

Alla svar som jag får tillbaka kommer att endast användas till denna undersökning och ni som svarar är helt anonyma under hela arbetet. Ångrar ni er och inte längre vill medverka i undersökningen kommer era svar tas bort. Ni är varmt välkommen att ta del av det färdiga arbetet i maj.

Tack för er medverkan!
Sarah Lindahl

Interview questions

(First in English, following in Swedish)

How long have you worked in childcare?

What did you experience as the advantages and disadvantages of working as a preschool teacher?

What different job titles did you have during your time in childcare?

Were you satisfied with your salary? Could salary have influenced your decision to switch careers?

Were you satisfied with the status of the preschool teacher? Could status have influenced your decision to switch careers?

Describe your working environment.

Were you satisfied with your working environment?

Group size

Support from the head teacher

Teamwork with your colleagues

Did you enjoy working as a preschool teacher?

Was your health a factor in your decision to work as a preschool teacher?

What are you currently working with?

Is there anything that you miss from being a preschool teacher?

Can you see yourself as a preschool teacher again?

What would it take for you to work as a preschool teacher again?

Intervju frågorna

Hur länge jobbade du inom barnomsorg?

Vad har förskollärarnas jobb för fördelar och nackdelar?

Vilka yrkestitlar hade du under den tiden du jobbade på förskolan?

Var du nöjd med din lön? Skulle lönen ha påverkat ditt beslut att byta yrken?

Var du nöjd med förskollärarens status? Skulle status ha påverkat ditt beslut att byta yrken?

Beskriv din arbetsmiljö.

Var du nöjd med din arbetsmiljö?

Storlek på barngruppen

Stöd från förskolechefen

Samverkan med kollegor

Trivdes du i din roll som förskollärare?

Var din hälsa en faktor kring ditt beslut att sluta jobba som förskollärare?

Vad jobbar du med nu?

Är det något du saknar från förskollärare yrket?

Skulle du kunna tänka dig att börja jobba som förskollärare igen?

Vad skulle krävas för att du skulle tillbaka till yrket?