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Research Article

Children's experiences: The institutional grip of evaluation in Swedish school-age educare

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Abstract: Swedish school-age educare has, in the last 25 years, undergone extensive reforms with revised goals for work in practice and new working conditions. The reforms and changing conditions seem to have challenged practice in terms of quality. Since 2010, instead of programme evaluation for generating knowledge about the expected benefits for children of attending school-age educare, quality and evaluation have been regulated in the Education Act 2010:800(2010) as decentralised, continuous, ongoing systematic quality work led by school leaders and teachers themselves. The aim of this study was to examine the norms and the social order forming evaluation in school-age educare practice, including how staff think institutionally about evaluation, how evaluation is classified and categorised and identifying institutional shadows. The article is built on interviews with 53 staff members in twelve different centres. The interviews were analysed using Mary Douglas' (1986) theory about how institutions think. The analysis contains a careful reading of interviews through a theoretically informed institutional lens and has resulted in different categories of evaluation in SAEC, as well as the identification of an institutional shadow. Children's experiences is discussed as the institutional grip and shadowing goals and results in evaluation. Finally, it argues for institutional change.

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Introduction

In the late 1990s Johansson and Karlsson (1997) called for a programme evaluation of Swedish School-Age Educare (SAEC) in order to identify and develop relevant content, quality criteria's and professional competencies for the centres. More than 25 years later, the evaluation of SAEC as a programme for school-age children's learning, development and meaningful leisure time is, however, still rare besides two reports from the Swedish School Inspectorate (2010; 2018). The results of the inspections are unimpressive, since the reports mainly conclude that the teaching content is unclear, and care is hard to provide since there are too many children in the groups. Instead of programme evaluation for generating knowledge about the expected benefits for children of attending SAEC, quality and evaluation have been regulated in the Education Act (2010:800) since 2010 as decentralised, continuous, ongoing systematic quality work (SQW) led by school leaders and teachers themselves.

Unlike in many other European countries, there is no regulation of group size and child-to-staff ratio to ensure quality in Sweden (Plantenga & Remery, 2013). In contrast to most other European countries, Sweden has regulations for professional qualifications, where staff are required to have a teacher education. Yet only 43% of staff working in Swedish SAEC are qualified (Swedish National Agency for Education [SNAE], 2023) and in private schools the rate is only 27%. Despite professional requirements and the high availability of children whose parents are working or studying, the quality of Swedish SAEC is ranked low, from the European perspective, due to the lack of regulation of group sizes and child-to-staff ratios (Plantenga & Remery, 2013). In addition, Lager (2020a) identified that academically educated staff, stable staff teams, dedicated rooms, available material and time to plan and prepare work are distinctive quality features of SAEC centres. The variety between quality features in practice is, however, immense. Furthermore, knowledge about how to work with evaluation in practice and how the missing regulations

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and conditions influence staff members' daily work, is lacking. According to the study by Ackesjö (2022) of evaluation in SAEC, there is a broad variety of logic for how evaluation should be carried out in practice.

Swedish SAEC has, in the last 25 years undergone extensive reforms, with revised goals for work in practice and new working conditions. The reforms and changing conditions seem to have challenged practice in terms of quality (Lager, 2020a). SAEC is, just like other pedagogical practices in the Swedish education system, obligated to work with quality and effectiveness in continual SQW, which forms the ways in which SAEC is shaped and organised (see Lager, 2015, 2019). Andersson (2013) found that, after the integration of compulsory schooling in the 1990s, in combination with a new policy to evaluate schools and SAEC together in mutual SQW, the quality part of SAEC was mostly left out of the reports. Saar et al. (2012) argue for a separate evaluation of SAEC that is different from that in compulsory schooling. Further, they claim that SAEC has a unique task to meet the children's interest and the centres must be evaluated and valued in themselves. The Swedish Institute for Educational Research (2021) research compilation on working methods in SAEC shows, however, that there are few studies in Swedish research in the field of SAEC that focus on working methods and their impact on children's learning and development.

Since there seems to be a lack of research on how staff in SAEC handle the task of evaluation in relation to both policy and conditions in practice, it becomes important to fill this gap by providing new knowledge. One starting point to impact the field is by examining staff perspectives of evaluation in practice. Therefore, this article examines the norms and the social order that form evaluation in practice, and how staff in SAEC institutionally think about evaluation. The following research questions are posed:

- How is evaluation classified and categorised by staff in SAEC?
- What are the institutional shadows?

This article is built on interviews with 53 staff members in 12 different SAEC centres. The interviews are analysed using Mary Douglas' (1986) theory about how institutions think. The analysis contains a careful reading of interviews through a theoretically informed institutional lens and has resulted in different categories of evaluation in SAEC, as well as identifying institutional shadows. The result is discussed in relation to the task of SAEC and previous research, and it argues for institutional change.

Background

International research on evaluation in after-school centres is limited, mainly due to the fact that the corresponding international activities (out of school/after-school programmes, after-school centres, leisure time centres, all-day-school, everyday school, extracurricular activities, school-age care, educare and extended education) do not have the same tasks regarding care, teaching and education. Swedish SAEC centres are unique in the way that they are part of an integrated education system with a mission of education, learning and teaching along with the mission of meaningful leisure time, recreation and care (Klerfelt et al., 2020). Internationally, for example, the mission of after-school programmes is linked to the care of school children with a clearer focus on social work in vulnerable groups, or as practical/aesthetic activities with the aim of strengthening students´ knowledge of school subjects (extracurricular activities). In a meta-analysis of American after-school programmes, Durlak et al. (2010) show that after-school programmes have positive impacts on children and youth who participate. The impact is described as a positive development in children's 'personal, social, and academic life' (p. 299). The researchers highlight the fact that, according to their results, after-school programmes need to be recognised as an important community focus for promoting the personal and social well-being of children and youth. At the same time, the results show large variations in how effective the programmes are and Durlak et al. (2010) suggest that further research should look into the variations between the programmes and how these variations impact the development of the children.

From a European perspective, Plantenga and Remery (2017) examined the structural quality aspects of childcare of school-aged children. In Europe, there are also variations in programmes for the care and education of school-aged children outside of the school day, which makes it hard to compare. Nevertheless, when the indicators 'child-to-staff ratio', 'maximum group size' and 'qualification of staff' are used, quality

differs a lot between the European countries. Due to the structural quality, the results can be interpreted as 'countries that invest in a childcare infrastructure also seem to take account of the quality of OSC' [Out of school care] (Plantenga & Remery, 2017). The results are connected to the childcare system for younger children in the different countries and the welfare state and its funding. Like the American meta-analysis (Durlak et al., 2010) Plantenga and Remery (2017) suggest the need for more research about quality in each programme and more process quality.

In contrast to American after-school programmes, as well as those of many of the European countries, Swedish SAEC centres have both tasks of care and education within one and the same form of programme, which is at the same time encompassed by a broader teaching concept than compulsory school, which should form a whole entity of care, learning and development. Haglund (2015) shows the result of the 'schoolification' of the SAEC practice when encounter the elementary school´s organisation of content and work forms. As a result of the SAEC centre being evaluated in connection with the school´s quality reports, Saar et al. (2012) argue that SAEC centres has been assessed based on the school´s facilities and as a unit together with the school. Instead, they emphasise that the SAEC centre needs to be studied and evaluated in itself and that the school´s norm regarding the SAEC centres should be challenged (see also Lager, 2015). The researchers suggest that an evaluation of the SAEC centre in itself entails an exploration of knowledge opportunities in SAEC centres in everyday practice, where the children should be involved to a greater degree (Saar et al., 2012).

As noted previously, there are a lack of working methods for evaluating teaching in SAEC as part of SQW. However, the SAEC social pedagogical tradition also includes the mission of meaningful leisure time and social togetherness as quality criteria (Haglund et al., 2020), but these criteria are rarely evaluated. The everyday practice in the SAEC evaluation within the school system is usually characterised by traditions clashing when the goal management processes do not recognise the local practice´s quality criteria or need for development (Lager, 2020b). In Lager (2015; 2019), however, it is shown that the SAEC centre's tradition of local evaluation, with a focus on social and relational learning, can still be the focus of the teachers´ evaluation. The teachers in Lagers (2015) study used several different methods in their work to generate knowledge about their practice (observations, estimates, interviews), which could also be communicated with the leader of the centre. The general opinion, however, is that such work is difficult to carry out in view of the structural deficiencies that exist in SAEC centres today, lack of time for work team meetings, lack of time for planning and set-up and, not least, lack of qualified personnel (Lager, 2020a).

In a recent study on evaluation in SAEC centres, Ackesjö (2022) shows how the evaluation of SAEC centres is part of a neoliberal trend (compare Lager, 2015), like many other public activities, while evaluation is also guided by the professional logic of the teachers. However, the study shows that the task of evaluation appears to be complex and contradictory with regard to the different logic for evaluation and goal fulfilment and exposes the need for additional knowledge about evaluation in SAEC practices. To summarise, there seems to be a lack of both theoretical and practical knowledge about evaluation in SAEC; difficulties which are most likely intertwined.

Theoretical Points of Departure

To be able to interpret or change the (school) actors you need to understand the institutional thinking (Douglas, 1986; Trondman & Winerdal, 2019). When institutions think there is a need for more than a rule or a law on paper, it also needs to feel real and connected to everyday life. Douglas (1986) calls this the 'contemporary mood' (p. 69) in and around the institution. The contemporary mood is connected to the aspect of legitimacy and how the social order of the institution needs to legitimise its institutional thinking. To order the institutional thinking of SAEC staff, there is a need to identify the thinking style within institutional processing (p. 91). Every little thing staff do is something that classifies the social order of the institution. The processing helps to control the thinking, to shut out things that do not conform to the social order of the institution. Douglas' (1986) institutional theory in this article makes it possible to analyse what kind of evaluation is legitimated in SAEC. How institutions think and visualise, Douglas says, and how individuals and programmes are classified and categorised, are in line with what can be thought of.

Trondman & Winerdal (2019) argues that Douglas theory about how institutions think can contribute to educational studies by explaining the social order and institutional grip. This is helpful when interpreting the actors handling in practice. To identify the categorisation and classification of evaluation in the social practice, it is important to understand the norms of the thinking world the social order for evaluation in SAEC. The institutional processing works towards the joint persistence of confirming the institutional thinking. The categorisation works to control what it is possible to think of. Problems seem to be solved within the given form of the thinking style, such as 'This is the real way of doing it'. This is what Douglas (1986) calls the 'institutional grip'.

Trondman and Winerdal (2019) describe the things the institution does not think of as 'shadowed' institutional places. The shadow is outside the thinking world of the institution. The institutional thinking lacks critical thinking, Douglas (1986) argues. The shadow does not belong to the institutions' own understanding, which explains why the people in it cannot question it. This makes it important to also analyse what is not talked about and questioned in the SAEC staff's evaluation.

Method

Research Design

This study is part of a project about children's leisure in school-age educare, where 12 centres were followed for one week each with observations and interviews with staff and children. Group interviews with staff in the twelve centres is used in this article.

Context of the Study and Participant

In the interview groups there was a variation in the numbers of people taking part, and a variation in education degrees, experience, in locations of schools, etc. (see Table 1).

Table 1. Interviewed staff and centres

Centres	Number of staff members interviewed	Staff	Location P (private school)
Antelope	4	Mix of teachers and staff with and without degrees	Countryside, rural, small school (P)
Bear	6	Mostly staff without degrees, some with	Large town, urban, small school
Dolphin	4	Teachers with degrees	Middle-sized town, large school (P)
Elephant	3	Mix of staff with and without degrees, some substitutes	Large town, urban, large school
Fish	6	Teachers with degrees	Small school, middle-sized town
Gorilla	6	Mix of staff with and without degrees	Large town, urban, small school
Hare	2	Mix of staff with and without degrees	Small town, rural, middle-sized school
Impala	3	Teachers with degrees	Large town, small school
Koala	2	Mix of staff with and without degrees, some substitutes	Large town, small school
Lion	8	Mostly staff without degrees and substitutes	Large town, small school
Swan	3	Mix of staff with and without degrees and substitutes	Small town, middle-sized school, rural
Tiger	6	Mostly teachers with degrees	Large town, small school,

Note. This variety in staff qualifications mirrors the Swedish situation, where there are few teachers with a degree in Education.

Data Collections Tool

To be able understand the social order of evaluation in SAEC, group interviews were carried out with 53 staff members from 12 different SAEC centres. Group interviews were chosen to develop an in-depth discussion of evaluation. Inspired by focus group interviews (Parker & Triter, 2006; Wibeck, 2010), themes for discussion in groups were created by the researcher. The themes were elaborated on in the interviews and the group members discussed different perspectives with each other, led by the researcher. This method is valuable, not just to answer the researcher's questions, but also to delve more deeply into

the theme, so the group members can see that they perhaps have different perspectives and can contribute not only to the research, but also to the understanding of the other group members. The twelve group interviews were recorded and transcribed by the author.

Due to ethical considerations, all participating staff were informed by the researcher about the study and gave their written consent to participate (Swedish Research Council, 2017). All staff at SAEC centres who had the opportunity and interest to join were welcome to participate in interviews. This resulted in groups ranging from two to 10 participants, who were interviewed at their workplaces. The variation in numbers of participants also depended on the size of the SAEC at the school and how it was organised. The time of the interview was set up in a dialogue where staff had time to sit down and talk, mostly for a period of one to one-and-a-half hours. They were all informed that they would be kept anonymous and that all data would be kept safely at the university, according to the regulations. No names of people, schools or SAEC centres are used; in cases where there are names, these are fictitious. In Sweden, SAEC centres are usually given names. In this study, fictitious animal names are used.

Data Analysis

Inspired by Douglas' (1986) theory of institutional thinking, the interest of this study is aimed at the institutional grip concerning evaluation in SAEC. Douglas uses two concepts for the institutional processing, categorisation and classification. In this article, these concepts are used to analyse what it is possible to think of regarding evaluation in SAEC. The categorisation controls the institutional thinking of evaluation. In this article, classification is used to analyse the categorisation in-depth, looking in detail at how the categorisation is built up.

In the first phase of reading the interviews (332 transcribed pages), the topic of evaluation in general was coded. In the next step, classification of the coding was done, which identified how staff think about evaluation and what norms inform this. In the next step, each categorisation was delved into in order to deepen the understanding and identify the classifications within the category. This analysis shows how different thinking is possible in the same category. There is a common social order for SAEC staff but, at the same time, there are different classifications, showing the many different ways to think within a category. This forms the first part of the result.

In the last step, I analysed what the staff do not talk and think about, which I had to ask more about in the interviews. In some examples, staff members tried to answer my question but sometimes there were simply no answers, as it was outside their way of thinking of evaluation. This shadow in the institutional thinking forms the second part of the result.

Findings

The findings are presented in two parts. The first part presents the analysis of how evaluation is classified and categorised, while the second part of the findings presents the institutionalised shadows.

Classification and Categorisation of Evaluation

This first part of the result deals with the question of how evaluation is categorised and classified by staff. During the analysis, three different categories were identified, all of which contain the span of how staff think about evaluation within the categorisation, classified in different ways. The themes are *Evaluation in the moment or on special occasions, Documentation as mental notes or essays* and *Dialogues in practice or structured interviews and surveys.* Each category will be described, visualised in examples, and then interpreted.

Evaluation in the Moment or on Special Occasions

In this category, evaluation is classified in a range from talking about evaluation as something that is done in time, with the children or with a colleague. It can be done by asking children questions or telling the children to show the answers with their thumbs, up or down. At the other end of the range, staff

members classify evaluation as something that is only done on special occasions, particular days that are prearranged for evaluation.

Evaluation in the Moment

Teacher 1: I think we evaluate every now and then in the moment with each other, because we rarely have time after a session, we don´t have time for reflection.

Teacher 2: No, we don´t have that time.

Teacher 1: But we meet once a week and then we talk.

Researcher: What are you doing there, at that moment?

Teacher 1: Checks how it went, what was good, what was bad, maybe we wouldn´t do this again or 'Good, this was fun we´ll try it again', 'The kids liked this' and then you can evaluate by talking to the children, how they experience it.

(Interview with staff at the Fish)

Special Days for Evaluation

Teacher 3: Exactly, because we got these days, we sat and wrote but then we wrote the 'Fripp' there, and the evaluation there. (…) Then we wrote that we have done it a couple of times but not as often as we said, maybe we did it every two weeks, or every week, maybe it was every other week, maybe it was only once a month? And then we wrote why, because they were a little different. So, we wrote that in the 'Fripp', the evaluation, when we had that evaluation day. Because it´s that one we´re going to have again, you mean, next week?

Teacher 1: Yes, we have, I was the one who brought up this idea that we should have evaluation at the work team meeting, and we need these days so we can evaluate and move forward.

Teacher 3: Quarterly huh?

Teacher 1: Yes quarterly, and then we have one in the middle of the semester, we didn´t have that before but it is Moa [leader] that has realised that now.

(Interview with staff at the Koala)

In the first example above, the staff talk about how they use daily practice to talk with the children, and how they can bring these moments into their mutual planning time once a week. It is nothing that is written down, only talked about and directly connected with different activities they have done with the children. In the other example, the staff are classifying evaluation as something they do on special occasions for evaluation. These occasions seem to be important to move their work forward. In the second example the work is a written evaluation in a special model called a 'Fripp'. To be able to work with the evaluation model, they need mandated time from the leader. Even if these two examples differ in how evaluation is classified, whether orally or written, both examples show that staff categorise evaluation as something both collegial and time consuming and that it is based on the children's experiences of the activities they offer.

Documentation as Mental notes or Written Essays

There seems to be a common categorisation of documentation as a part of evaluation in all staff groups, as a part of SQW. When staff classify documentation, it can be from thinking, taking mental notes and remembering by themselves, or, as other explains it, writing long essays.

Mental Notes

Preschool teacher: Yes but you don´t put it on paper but you like ... .

Teacher 1: Yes, but you still make some form of this … .

Preschool teacher: ... just like ... .

Teacher 1: A storage in mind.

Preschool teacher: Yes, a mental note there, yes.

Teacher 1: Yes, and then you come up with 'Yes exactly that, there are several children who have said this, it is something they would like to do'.

(Interview staff at the Gorilla)

Written Essays

Teacher 4: You don´t have to write much in them here either, and it´s very clear and simple.

Teacher 3: It depends on who you talk to, I think because at Pile (another centre in the neighbourhood) they write essays, and I just … essays? I don´t think you need to do that.

Teacher 1: It must have been someone who writes essays.

Teacher 3: Yes, that´s probably the person I´ve been talking to then, unfortunately, so I get really stressed!

Teacher 4: But I think that that system is great because in the 'Fripp' template or whatever you want to say, you immediately have all the goals that you can connect to the curriculum so you can just click. But we actually work with that, then you can just put it in, and it´s there! It´s not that you have to sit and copy and paste or something like that, but it´s clearly there.

(Interview with staff at Fish)

In these examples documentation is categorised as part of evaluating their work, but it is classified in different ways depending on how they think about it. In the first example, documentation is classified as a mental note; the preschool teacher says, 'it is not written on paper', and later, 'it is a mental note'. In the second example, the staff talk about how they get stressed by hearing that other colleagues are writing long essays as documentation. They talk about how, instead of writing essays, they want templates they just can 'click on'. They classify the task of evaluation as one where there has to be a lot of writing, but they are also discussing ways to get around it in practice. Even in this case, they talk about the model named 'Fripp', a kind of template forming the way they can think about documenting and evaluating. However, documenting is classified as something that can range from mental notes to written essays, based on memories, mental notes or written notes of children's experiences.

Dialogues in Practice or Structured Interviews and Surveys

In this category, evaluation is categorised as gathering children's experiences of learning and development. On the one hand, this is classified as gathering everything together in a dialogue. On the other hand, it is classified as conducting structured interviews or surveys where teachers ask questions of the children, which are later gathered and analysed by the teachers.

Dialogue in Practice

Teacher in training 2: You sometimes do thumbs up and things like that, I think that there is a dialogue that is not so systematic but is still there. Then you need to document it with the children in dialogue, you listen in and feel it you see what they do and try to follow it. So, I think there is a dialogue, and I think, for example, that it is a privilege to have the mornings sometimes because you can have another conversation.

Researcher: OK.

Teacher in training 2: Even if there aren´t that many children, it´s like, they get a little more space to talk, if something special has happened, maybe you talk about that too.

(Interview with staff at the Bear)

Structured Interviews

Teacher: I spontaneously think that we have tried to systematise the students´ participation in the evaluation of the activities, we have student interviews that are ongoing. We try to conduct and have them with everyone to get their experience of the centre and how they enjoy themselves and so on, to help us. Maybe we change some things or make some things clearer or something. Then we use the iPad, as it is usually relatively high motivation to think about various more specific things.

(Interview with staff at the Swan)

In this category, evaluation is categorised as gathering children's experiences and classified as something done as staff in daily practice in dialogue with the children or as structured interviews and surveys. The classification shows a range from low structure to high structure, where both ways aim to hear about the children's experiences. The issue about being systematic is highlighted, either not so systematic or very systematic. In the first example, staff classify dialogues in the mornings as good because there are fewer children participating and the dialogue form works well. At other times of the day there seem to be too many children or no good time to gather all the children's perspectives so, in order to let all

the children give their perspectives, they structure it with interviews or surveys, sometimes digitally. For example, in the second interview, staff talk about using the iPad to answer questions from the staff. This categorisation, like the one before, shows that the degree of structure differs in the centres, which mirrors the way it is classified.

The social norm of evaluation is formed as conducting children's experiences. Gathering children's experiences seems to be the institutional grip. Each of the three categories shows the institutional thinking of evaluation as gathering children's experiences of the practice, and for that they sometimes use more or less structured methods.

Institutionalised Shadows of Evaluation

This second part of the result deals with the institutional shadows. In analysing staff members' discussions about evaluation, notes were taken about what is not spoken or thought about. Hardly any of the interviewees talked about the link and connections between doing good work with children's learning and leisure and the school's facilities. Even if children's experiences are the institutional grip, evaluation, as goals and outcomes of the work, is not discussed. In the following examples it is visualised.

Shadows

> Researcher: Yes, but you said at the beginning, I think you talked about why you work in this centre because there are specific facilities. It is made visible that you have good facilities versus if you were to work in another department that has worse. So, what is it possible to achieve concerning the facilities? I am looking for if what you can do is dependent on purely physical premises and if they do not exist, is it visible in your evaluation if that leads to success, or perhaps failure?
>
> Pedagogue: In the best of all worlds, it should be so. I think that you shouldn´t see any difference based on what facilities you have. Because we have talked a lot about that, it has come up that we are doing very well here because we have the premises. But we say that it´s not the facilities that make it work, it´s what you do with it. I hope, just because you have more rooms and things like that, that it it doesn't make a difference. I would easily accept that challenge if they were to put me, I don´t know where I'll end up in the fall, for example. But if they were to put me somewhere else where I get to be in a classroom, it´s still the same thinking. Like we´re going to do good work, as good as we can, regardless of where we are. So, I don´t want it to be seen that there is any difference, because of where you are.
>
> (Interview with staff at the Swan)

In this quote I try to formulate a question about how their work is connected to the facilities in their practice. The pedagogue, on the one hand, says that they have rooms that differ from the others at the school but, on the other hand, he says that the rooms do not mean anything, it is the thinking of the staff that matters. Despite having rooms or not, they will be able to do good work. I argue that this institutional thinking does not give space for any critical thinking about their work in relation to the facilities. It is institutionalised in the social order that the room or other physical premises, such as number of children, etc., do not influence the quality of their work; it is not questioned.

In the next example, I ask about the facilities in practice in influencing the ability to do good work:

> Researcher: Do you usually think in terms of how the facilities you have influence what you can do?
>
> Caretaker: Yes, sometimes it happens.
>
> Teacher: Sometimes. Yes, it can be seen somewhere in your documentation.
>
> Caretaker: Yes, it can be sometimes in evaluations that you can … .
>
> Teacher: Yes, in that there are only two of us.
>
> Caretaker: Like when we baked waffles, for example, the other day, or last Friday, we had a lot more children than we usually have, we had 35 against 25 on a Friday.
>
> Teacher: And then you´re alone because she is in the kitchen, and then I´m alone with everyone else and then a lot of things happen because then you´re not enough staff.
>
> Caretaker: Then it will be seen in our evaluation that you are short on staff.

Researcher: Because there is something that I think often doesn´t come up because it has become so obvious that you lack resources.

Teacher: Yes, I know exactly.

Caretaker: I know, for example, last year when these children were smaller, we didn´t go down to the beach because of there being 35 children and then also a very worried parent so then you back off.

Researcher: Yes, so there will be activities that you leave and those that don´t leave then?

Teacher: A little longer then.

Caretaker: Yes exactly.

(Interview with staff at the Hare)

In this example, the teacher and caretaker discuss how the number of staff decide what can be done, that some activities, such as baking or going to the beach, are not possible with the number of staff and children. Not doing things they should is the social norm, the way to think around it. How this affects their work in terms of quality is not thought about. Even if, as in this example, they discuss how they are short of staff and cannot do the things they want to, no one seems to care that the children are deprived of a lot of learning activities and meaningful leisure in line with this thinking. The lack of facilities being as it is, this is the contemporary mood. It is not thought about in terms of goals and outcomes. There is really no connection between how their work facilities are linked to the fulfilment of the task. Only when I asked that specific question did some of them try to give an answer, but many times there was no answer, meaning that they hadn't thought about it! This, I argue, is the shadow of the institution's social order. What is shadowed is that there are no facilities in practice to work with the curriculum goals. Practice is constrained and leads to lack of continuity and competence.

The shadow, what is not talked about, lacks critical thinking. Evaluation, as presented above, is mainly about children's experiences of their work, which of course are important, and also about the models they use for documenting these experiences. But how these experiences are connected to what is supposed to be done – the goals and the outcomes, the results of the work in terms of learning, development, care and meaningful leisure – is not thought about, or even criticised. Children's experiences remain at the level of local knowledge, linked only to isolated activities they have done.

Conclusion and Discussion

The aim of this article has been to examine the norms and the social order of evaluation in practice, and the institutional thinking about evaluation in SAEC centres. The question of how evaluation is classified and categorised by staff is answered, as evaluation is categorised as gathering children's experiences, but it is classified to varying systematic degrees. Mostly, the process seems to be like other neoliberal trends of quality and effectiveness in the work with SQW, using templates and models. However, the degree of structure differs when you look at the classification, and there is no discussion at all about goals to be fulfilled. The institutions are structured in different ways depending on resources and facilities. We know from previous research (Haglund, 2015; Lager, 2020a) that the practice in general is restrained but it seems to differ from one centre to another in how firmly it has to be structured. Some staff teams seem to have more time for working and reflecting together. Other teams seem only be able to do the very simplest when it comes to the time-consuming work of evaluation, but doing it in interaction with children seems to be the social order. So, even if the classification seems to differ in order of structure, the categorisation of evaluation of what it is in practice is quite similar, in terms of social order.

The second research question has examined the institutional shadows of evaluation. The fact that daily practice suffers from ideal conditions, lack of continuity and lack of competence, is not related to the fact that the goals are not fulfilled. Mostly, staff think that they have to organise daily practice by themselves first, then work with the goals and then evaluate. They seem not to have thought that it could be done in another way – the institution lacks critical thinking, as Douglas (1986) puts it. This, I argue, is an institutionalised shadow – the link between conditions in practice and the goals and outcomes of the evaluation, after years of constraints, lack of ideal conditions, loss of competence and lack of pedagogical

leadership of SAEC. With this shadow, it is not possible to make any differences which indicate the need for institutional change in practice.

Even if there are regulations in Sweden for evaluation as part of SQW, there seem to be variations in practice. This is connected to the way of thinking in practice, the social order and how institutions think of evaluation. It is also connected to the wide task of evaluation to include care, meaningfulness, learning and development, a very broad task. In addition, the staff in Swedish SAEC, along with the lack of ideal conditions, lack competence. From a European perspective, Sweden is rated highly regarding staff regulations but low according to the lack of regulations of group size (Plantenga & Remery 2013; 2017). In Sweden a lot of children participate in SAEC, compared to other countries around the world. It is not very common that over 80% of all children in school aged between six and nine years of age attend SAEC, like in Sweden (SNAE, 2023). In the light of American studies (Durlak et al., 2010), good quality after-school programmes are highlighted as promoting positive development in children and youth.

An interesting note is that most of the staff categorise evaluation as something they need to discuss in work teams, together. In this way, evaluation is categorised as something mutual. Some of the staff teams say they have some time for this, some do not. Staff try to gather to discuss together, reflect upon their work and documenting the proceedings and they use mutual planning time for planning and reflecting, but it all remains as local knowledge.

Based on this study's findings I suggest that it is time for a programme evaluation of Swedish SAEC, as Johansson and Karlsson (1997) called for in the 1990s. With such a high level of participation of children in Swedish SAEC, the outcomes of such a policy should be informed. It is also suggested that policy for SAEC should guide the staffs work with evaluation of children's learning, development, and meaningful leisure. The current study was conducted with 53 staff members from 12 different centres, representing centres with variations in education degrees and conditions. The limitations of this study may be connected to the stories of the staff. It thus suggests that more research about goal fulfilment and evaluation is needed in teachers' daily practice. Just as with other practices, SAEC staff talk about SQW and tools and models to achieve quality in their work with evaluation. The institutional shadow of evaluation in SAEC and the lack of possibilities to fulfil the mission of SAEC shows, as Douglas put it, that institutions lack critical thinking.

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