Goal of the Case Study

- To research the Swedish Education system’s implementation of Gender Equality through “counteracting” gender norms within the preschool system. This is mandated by the Education Act and Preschool Curriculum.

Addressing

- What problems may a decentralised system encounter implementing this program?

- What are the potential challenges faced by teaching staff and administrators?
Equality and Preschool - ECEC

Equality and Preschool
- Universal access to quality development
- A time of immense brain development.
- Setting a foundation for life-long learning
- Preventative measure for later life disadvantages.

Gender Equality in Preschool
- Gender Identities formed by the age of 6
- Beliefs/actions of teachers impact the development of children
- Gendered identity contrasts “fixed” vs. “static”
- Gender identities negotiated throughout lifetime situations
Sweden - Population 9 Million

- 86% of the population live in the southern half
- Constitutional Monarchy/Parliamentary Democracy
- History of Childcare since the 1970’s
- Ranked 6th 2007/2008 HDI
- The Global Gender Gap Report
  - 1st - 2006
  - 1st - 2007
  - 3rd - 2008
- 50/50 male-female ratio parliament and government
**Methods – Gathering the Facts**

- Research base – Stockholm. The centre of government, the Ministry of Education and 3 main Education agencies responsible for operational support, monitoring and evaluating all schools/programs within Sweden’s municipalities.


- Interview selection based on individual involvement with either Gender Equality/research or policy work within the Early Childhood Education and Child system.

- Interview participants included University Gender Researchers, Municipal School Board Education Representatives, Ministry of Education Representatives and Ministry of Education Civil Servants, Preschool teachers, Preschool headmasters, and Gender Pedagogues
Methods – Getting to Details

- Selected participants were those people charged with the most responsibility to ensure gender equality is integrated within and cascades throughout the system.

- Participants had ground level importance and authority to ensure the effective development of preschool children in such a matter as to provide the next generation with sound principles of gender equality in Swedish society.

- Participants had the most knowledge and highest awareness level of the progression and impact of gender equality within the ECEC program.

- Participants had a distinct view of the overall impact on the general population and whether downstream students continued in an unbiased mode.
The Preschool System
Affordable, Accessible & Universal

- **Maximum Fee Program** introduced in 2003, 15 free hours per/wk or 525 hours per/year
- Maximum cost - 1\textsuperscript{st} Child -840 SEK, 2\textsuperscript{nd} Child -420 SEK, 3\textsuperscript{rd} Child, 420 SEK= Total 1260 SEK for 3 or more children
- **Rapid Expansion** leading to **Universal Coverage**
- 1975-2005 - from 50,000 to 350,000 spaces available
- 2001-2005 an estimated 15,000 children were added
- Due to lift on regulations of access, no longer is it contingent on parental employment.
- Currently 50-60% of women employed in the labour market with at least 1-child
Sweden’s Gender Equality Policy

1- A Decentralised Education System

2- Preschools are responsible for “counteracting traditional gender norms”

3- Goal to instil gender equality within students. Allowing children life possibilities not hindered by gender norms or roles or expectations.

Affords legal protection, practicing gender equality within schools is mandated through four documents:
Gender equality Focus

1- The Municipal City Preschool Curriculum

2- The Act Prohibiting Discrimination and other Degrading Treatment of Children

3- The Equal Opportunities Ombudsman

4- The Equal Treatment Plan (School Plan)

"The preschool should work to counteract traditional gender patterns and gender roles. Girls and boys in the preschool should have the same opportunities to develop and explore their abilities.

The preschools shall work actively against stereotype gender Roles. Girls and boys in the preschool shall have the same possibilities to discover and develop their talents and interests"
Qualitative Results

- *Education Act and Curriculum not clear on what constitutes breaking down gender norms*

- *Education Act and Curriculum not clear on what constitutes gender equality (end points).*

- *Municipalities, Schools and teachers administer at own discretion*

- *Preschool Teacher Education does not prepare teachers for how to teach “gender equality”*

- *Communication improvements are necessary to provide more widespread knowledge and awareness of early gender equality at multiple levels (State, Municipality, District, School)*
Qualitative Results (Cont’d)

• **Governing agencies appear to function in a silo approach to implementation.**

• **Effective, scheduled evaluations of Gender Equality progress are limited to non-existent**

• **Performance of teachers appears hinged on dedication and commitment – training is not administered to ensure consistency and quality.**

• **Lack of consistency regarding program implementation occurs at all levels (State, municipal, educational inspectorate, teachers and headmasters).**

• **Periodic updates and regular progress reports to the general public from governing agencies is lacking.**
A look at the Problem of clarity in: “Gender” and “Equality”

- The national requirement for gender equality within Early Childhood Education and Care is designed to target deconstructing gender norms and roles within the educational environment of the preschool system.

- There are TWO contrasting understandings of gender acquisition directly influencing teaching gender in Swedish preschools.

1) Sex-role socialization (often linked with Developmentally Appropriate Pedagogy- DAP).

2) Post-structural a feminist theory (also titled a complicating pedagogy) often linked with critical pedagogy.
A look at the Problem of clarity in: “Gender” and “Equality” (2)

- Teachers are ultimately “teaching gender” along a continuum of the above ideologies associated with gender theory

- Teachers choice of what constitutes quality education or quality gender work is highly influenced by the pedagogy and theory they operate under both knowingly and unknowingly (i.e. teacher pedagogy versus gender and equality concepts versus gender pedagogy),

- This is magnified and complicated by the lack of direction given by the education system.
Discussion
“Re-align, re-configure & re-invigorate!”

• The Swedish preschool system is not a highly regulated program with quantifiable and measurable outcomes.

• There are no specified methods for ensuring equality is reached, no end points; there is also no specified mechanism for ensuring that gender equality is achieved.

• By only providing “global direction” within the curriculum and education act, rather than specific methods and processes for achieving gender equality, educators are left to their own devices to interpret not only the semantics of the legislation, but also what “promoting equality” in early childhood education means and requires.
Questions for Further Research

- What is success in terms of Gender Equality? And who decides this?

- In preschool education, is it better to be addressing Gender equality through any means rather than no Gender equality at all?

- Is it possible to create a standard for Gender Equal ideals?

- Would every teacher adhere to it?

- Is it possible to create an effective and efficient program in a decentralised system?