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The need for speed: identification of ‘the deviant’ as the ultimate goal for high returns in early childhood education and care

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ABSTRACT
This study aims to develop knowledge about how ‘the Deviant’ is produced through identificatory mapping materials that operate in Swedish preschools. This is achieved by identifying and critically reviewing a base of mapping materials commonly used in Swedish ECEC today, focusing on how the documents per se, and the formulations therein, risk pointing both the writer and the recipient in certain directions. This includes analysing the pre-existing structure and content as well as the proposed purpose of the mapping material. Drawing on Foucault, I consider documentation as a productive discursive element in a larger apparatus, where the mapping materials operate as a governing technology for making normalising judgments. The analysis contributes to an understanding of the documentality governing ECEC professionals, which affects how they resonate, and act in aiming to fulfil their mission in identifying certain children. In line with this reasoning, I also point out the specific status the documents have gained in the global ECEC quality discourse. The analysis shows how mapping documents named Pedagogical Mapping operate as a discursive element of the apparatus of early childhood special education identification processes and become fruitful for visibilising, comparing, and assessing the child and for further governing.

Introduction
Early childhood education in Sweden is aligned with the Nordic tradition, where the welfare state ambitions are highly ranked in international reports (e.g. OECD, 2017). The preschool must be equal and offer all children high-quality early childhood education (SFS 2010:800). The Swedish preschool, which in many aspects shares values with early childhood education and care (ECEC) in the other Nordic countries (Hännikäinen, 2016), is a strongly child-centred educational institution. Thus, it is natural that discussions about children’s perceived needs have held a special position within preschool discourses at different levels (Palla, 2021). An analysis of the latest revision of the preschool curriculum shows a fortified hegemonic discourse about preschool for all
children, where child-centred and inclusive approaches are dominant and where special education is largely constituted by more management, stimulation, and special support (Palla, 2018/2020). However, before these actions comes the identification process, where documentation is key.

Although documentation is not a new phenomenon in ECEC (Palla, 2011; Vallberg Roth, 2014), the extent of documentation practices is increasing in ECEC in the Nordic countries and has a central position in its quality work. In addition, documentation plays a key role in early childhood special education as it is promoted as a safeguard to the child’s right to support, to raise the quality of ECEC and to create obligations for professionals. This position can be problematised (Beneke & Love, 2022). This increased focus on data-based governance has been called the ‘governance turn’ of education (Ball, 2009). Krejsler (2012) argues that ECEC is undergoing a reformulation that extends from transnational contexts such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the European Union (EU) to the national, municipal, and institutional levels. During the governance turn, demand for documenting practices, including the production of either written or numerical data, has become a dominant technique of governing (Ozga et al., 2011; Palla, 2021; Piattoeva, 2018).

According to Erixon and Erixon Arreman (2017), the Nordic countries educational systems are becoming increasingly documented. Swedish ECEC is no exception, as it is part of an educational system that has a prominent and widespread culture of documentation practices. Documentation can be viewed as a tool for achieving high quality, but it can also be considered a technology of power where the primary purpose of education is seen as providing guidance on and assessment of childhood performance based on predetermined goals and outcomes (Moss, 2017). One could call it an investment in early intervention, intended to produce high returns. At the core of these efforts are those who do not live up to the expectations placed upon them. In line with this reasoning, these children need to be identified – the earlier, the better. Consequently, extra emphasis is put on the documentation and assessment of certain children who, for various reasons, are identified as being in need of special education, which in turn results in further documentation. In line with these efforts, Moss (2017) asserts,

The field of early childhood education is increasingly dominated by a strongly positivistic and regulatory discourse, the story of quality and high returns, which has spread from its local origins in the favourable environment provided by a global regime of neoliberalism. (abstract, author’s italics)

In the following, I claim the need to view these intentions from different perspectives, including critical ones. For instance, could there be troubling consequences connected to these intentions? For example, what does it mean to a young child if documented as not competent or not good enough and so forth. Also, one could ask what is removed in ECEC educational practice to make room for the continuously growing documentation practices. With preschool as the first step in the education system and with special education being seen as a key area in matters concerning preschool quality, different forms of research regarding special education documentation in preschool play a central role (Palla, 2019). Special education is often preceded by some kind of identification process using specific documents or templates, for example, mapping materials. Previous studies (e.g. Franck, 2021; Heiskanen et al.,
2019; Palla, 2018) show multiple challenges, uncertainty, and resistance around several documents related to special education. The studies show that different types of special education documentation focuses primarily on the individual child rather than on how education can contribute to development, education, and learning or how such strategies evolve. Instead, the perceived lack of performance, skills, or deviation from behavioural norms of certain preschoolers tends to be assessed and evaluated in the normative documentation. Work on critiquing neoliberalism (and documenting systems) are well established, not least from the field of disability studies (e.g. Mitchell et al., 2019; Slee et al., 1998; Snyder & Mitchell, 2006). However, there is a limited body of research regarding the specific mapping material used in the identification processes related to special education in Nordic ECEC, especially concerning how discursive constructions of young children are created.

Therefore, the overall purpose is to develop knowledge about how ‘the deviant’ is produced through the identificatory mapping materials that operate in Swedish preschools daily practice. The study is limited to identifying and critically reviewing a base of mapping materials with the following definition: commonly used in Swedish ECEC today as a means to meet the demands both the legislation and the curriculum put on the preschool – namely, to pay particular attention to, that is, to identify, certain children who fall outside the norm for various reasons. This includes analysing the pre-existing structure and content as well as the proposed purpose of the mapping material.

The regulatory and governing national steering document for ECEC, Curriculum for Preschool: Lpfö 18 (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2018a), states that “The preschool must, in particular, be aware of children who, for various reasons, need more guidance and stimulation or special support” (p. 6). Further, the work team must ‘take notice of and provide guidance and stimulation to all children, as well as special support to those children who, for various reasons, need it in their development’ (p. 15).

The statements in the regulatory documents regarding children’s needs are general, broad, and accommodating enough to allow for multiple alternative interpretations, but one recurring theme is that children’s various needs constitute a starting point for preschool. According to Palla (2021), the mission of being aware of and satisfying children’s needs is unclear in the regulatory document, insofar as this mission is presented in an overarching, overlapping, and sometimes contradictory and thus cryptic way. Awareness of and adaptation to children’s needs are expressed officially at a policy level as an indisputable fact, or as an established ‘matter of course’. However, it can be argued that this fact can be understood as something that must be reflected upon and negotiated in everyday preschool practice and in relation to, for instance, special education, where mapping material plays an important role.

Drawing on Foucault (1977), I view Swedish ECEC documentation as a technology of power, where the mapping materials are used for making normalising judgments within a specific discourse where the age appropriate child is the ideal (Palla, 2011). The mapping materials will be scrutinised with this particular focus. Foucault (1969/2002) describes discourse in his early work as multiple statements depending upon the same system of formation. In this way, Foucault asserts that he can speak of, for instance, an economic discourse or a psychiatric discourse. The equivalent in this study will be the concept of quality discourse in ECEC, which makes documentation and identification its nodal points and primary goal.
Analysing the documents will contribute to knowledge about discursive elements in the normative documents that serve to guide ECEC professionals in their daily work. The analysis contributes to an understanding of the documents, which affect both how they think and resonate and how they act in aiming to fulfil their mission in identifying and mapping certain children. This point of view makes the current study relevant as it questions a quality discourse that dominates and intersects with several aspects of society where documents have gained an elevated status, a sort of documentality (see Ferraris, 2007, 2009, 2013). In line with this reasoning, I also point out the specific status that documents have gained in the global ECEC quality discourse.

**Early identification**

In this ECEC quality discourse, the well-known concepts of early identification and early interventions, best practice, evidence-based assessments, and related documentation processes are afflicted with values that correlate with a particular view on children, childhood, and education. In fact, the ECEC is a field that employs a number of researchers and professionals with similar and overlapping aims and missions: to compensate and correct ‘the deviant’ children on their path through the educational system, the sooner the better. A number of knowledge fields, such as medicine, psychiatry, and neuroscience (see, e.g. Rose, 2006; Rose & Abi-Rached, 2013), have gained societal and educational advantages in making the youngest children their concern, promoting anxiety-inducing pictures of children not as successful as their peers, not as able as others, and with no other future than a dystopic one, unless measures are taken. There seems to be a need for speed in these normalisation processes that are working to save children from an uncertain future of despair (see, e.g. Davies, 1995; Franck, 2014; Lutz, 2009; Markström & Alasuutari, 2011; Palla, 2011, 2018; Palla & Sjögren, 2022; Schmidt, 2014; Strømme, 2019), where the presented solution is identification and correction or even medication (see also Rose, 2006, 2007) rather than appropriate education and care. An alternative way would be focusing on maintaining flexible, play-based, holistic practices with room for diversity.

The identification and intervention processes are perhaps fruitful in a number of ways and challenging in other ways. Early identification is not only a part of this well-established New Public Management discourse’s eagerness for measurability, objectivity, and universality (see also, Krejsler, 2012; Moss, 2017), but it is also a hunt to surveil, conform, and control the tiniest of citizens, which could very well result in negative effects and consequences for individual children and families as well as professionals in terms of identity, self-esteem, wellbeing, conformity issues and sense of belonging. In line with the ongoing early intervention efforts in high quality early childhood special education, the initial identification processes are performed, the sooner the better, as an investment governing for high returns in knowledgeable, well-behaved, productive, and adaptable young citizens. This puts an unreasonable weight on ECEC to fix the perceived or constructed problem. More problematic is that the current identification processes do not always lead to improved education, care, or well-being, rather the opposite (Palla, 2011, 2016, 2018).
**The identificatory mission, high-quality, and documentation**

The identificatory mission of ‘the deviant’ is in part surveilled and governed by state authorities. For example, a critical study by Palla and Sjögren (2022) generated knowledge about decisions by education authorities that serve an advisory and normative function for Swedish preschool education with a focus on work with children in need of special support. This was achieved by scrutinising documents generated in conjunction with a quality audit within the framework of the Swedish Schools Inspectorate’s three-year focus on preschools from 2015 to 2017. One recurring theme in the quality audits was methods for identifying children in need of special support. High-quality identification was repeatedly connected to elements such as the preparation of written mapping documents, common comprehensive document templates for action plans, and other written documentation.

A number of researchers have shown interest in issues regarding quality in Nordic preschool forms from different perspectives (e.g. Håkansson, 2019; Kampmann et al., 2019; Löfdahl, 2014; Sommersel et al., 2013; Vallberg Roth, 2014). However, there is a limited body of Nordic research related to quality and special education documentation (see Palla, 2019). Significant aspects in this limited literature are questions on assessments, categorisations, and the production and portrayal of children. Research that focuses on these aspects highlights how categorisations and development and deviation assessments of preschool children are created and how the scope for or limitations of children’s differences emerge in speech and writing among preschool staff (Franck & Nilsen, 2015; Heiskanen et al., 2018; Lutz, 2009; Palla, 2011, 2018).

When it comes to documentation with a broader focus than special education practices, the literature highlights how templates, forms, and other tools can be viewed as agentic in documentation processes, for example, regarding quality work (Elfström Petterson, 2019) and individual plans of different sorts (Alasuutari, 2015; Severinsson, 2016). The impact of documents is highlighted in a number of studies (Alasuutari et al., 2014; Severinsson, 2016).

Previous research shows how document templates per se, and the formulations found therein, risk pointing both the writer and the reader/recipient in certain directions. This has potential consequences for how children are produced and perceived and what (special education) initiatives are written down (see also Palla, 2011). The current study is limited to problematising and discussing the initial processes of identification and on documents that *pay particular attention* to certain children – that is, mapping ‘the deviants’.

**Theoretical assumptions**

Framing this study is Foucault’s notion of *dispositif*, here used synonymously with the English translation *apparatus*. In short, a dispositif can be understood as the whole of something, a social totality, that is, how a number of (discursive) elements come together in a specific place and time in order to govern behaviours as well as ways of thinking and being (see Foucault, 1972). Or as Foucault (1980) describes it,

What I’m trying to pick out with this term is, firstly, a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws,
administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions—in short, the said as much as the unsaid. Such are the elements of the apparatus. The apparatus itself is the system of relations that can be established between these elements. Secondly, what I am trying to identify in this apparatus is precisely the nature of the connection that can exist between these heterogeneous elements. . . . Thirdly, I understand by the term ‘apparatus’ a sort of—shall we say—formation which has as its major function at a given historical moment that of responding to an urgent need. The apparatus thus has a dominant strategic function. (p. 194–195; see also Foucault, 1976, 1977)

With this point of departure, ECEC (or even the whole educational system) in Western societies in general and Sweden in particular can be viewed as such an apparatus. This raises the question of which truth or reality is produced through the mapping materials that constitutes the current study’s empirical base.

The analysis also takes into consideration the Foucauldian concept of gouvernementalité, that is, governmentality (e.g. Foucault, 2003), here transformed into documentality (see also Ferraris, 2007, 2009, 2013), which is closely related to a specific view of power. According to Foucault (1980), power has intentions and aims. He also stresses that ‘individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application’ (p. 98). Foucault (1982/2000 asserts that all of us are subject to this discursive machinery.

Furthermore, the analysis will be concentrated on the documentational elements of preschool special educational processes seen as part of a differentiating practice (Foucault, 2000), where certain children are singled out and identified in a search for deviation. Related to this is the classificatory gaze (Foucault, 1973/2003). According to Foucault (1973/2003, the act of seeing—the gaze—became a central tool in the emergence and discourse of, for example, modern medicine. Foucault used the concept gaze (in French, le regard) in numerous ways, both between and within his works (e.g. 1973/2003, 1977), and closely linked it to perception. Similarly, the gaze and the notion of perception become central in the current analysis, where the perception of what becomes the focus of recording will be seen as a result of what can be described as the identificatory and registering gaze.

Foucault (1977) describes societal institutions and processes that include hierarchical surveillance and examination which divide individuals, identify deviations, and determine levels of merit, competence, and skills. Mapping material used in preschools arguably serve a similar function. In relation to the preschool being part of a governing, disciplinary system, Foucault (1977) believes that a disciplinary power has a disjunctive, analysing, and differentiating effect on individuals.

As Foucault (1973/2003 puts it (in relation to his ideas of the birth of the clinic, disease, and perceived pathological phenomena), ‘disease has a land, a mappable territory’ (p. 149). Applying this to ECEC practices, the detection of disease is transformed into the identification and production of deviance. The analysis will show how the power of the norm operates in this disciplinary system by governing through comparing human behaviours, actions, and achievements (Foucault, 1977) – in this case, through the construction of children in need of specific support.

**Material and analytical strategy**

A search and initial review process were carried out to explore which mapping materials were available to, and commonly used, in Swedish ECEC. To be included in the study, the
mapping materials should meet the following criteria: The template or program (word, pdf, power point, etc.) should address the preschool context. The template or program should clearly state its purpose being to map, chart, or likewise in the content, heading, or description. The main search phrase used was ‘mapping in preschool’. The material should not be limited to specific areas such as language, mathematics, or motor skills; instead, it should address overall pedagogical/educational issues. The material comprised a diversity of documents that ranged from international to local levels. The material as a whole comprised the following:

- International level: *International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health* (WHO) (13), and *Inclusive Early Childhood Education Environment Self-Reflection* (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education) (14)
- National level: Advisory material from Swedish National Agency for Education (15) and The National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools (16)
- Municipal level: The first twelve relevant results from a Google search 8 December 2022 of a document named *Pedagogical Mapping* (PM 1-12)
- Market/local level: The digital program *Unikum* (17) and two written pamphlets, *The Preschool Compass* (18) and *The Everyday Compass* (19).

A first overall analysis was made of the material (1–19) mentioned above (see the section: The Architects and the Authorities). However, the variety and scope of the material entailed a need for delimitation. I decided to focus on the municipal level and the most frequent document appearing in the Google searches: *Pedagogical Mapping* (=PM). The first twelve relevant results from a Google search 8 December 2022 were collected for further analysis of this specific document. After an initial review, two of these mapping materials did not meet the inclusion criteria for the analysis, whereas manual searches resulted in two additional mappings. Finally, twelve pedagogical mapping documents from different municipalities were included for an in-depth analysis (see Atkinson & Coffey, 2011). Since it was the most frequent relevant results (highest rankings) in the Google searches the assumption was made that these documents were commonly searched for and therefore prominent documents in this matter. The number of documents to be included in the study was not limited beforehand. Instead, decisions were made during the analysis process with regards to criteria as a material large enough to be trustworthy and limited enough to be possible to analyse. In addition, when the structure and content of the documents appeared similar or even the same in certain aspects, the conclusion was made that the material was sufficient enough. That the documents stem from different municipalities were of importance to strengthen the range of the material.

The aim was not to focus on how the forms are filled out but rather to analyse the pre-existing structure and content as well as the proposed purpose of the mapping materials that was included in the analysis. Hence, I emphasise the need these particular documents fulfil in the transnational game of normalisation (through identification of ‘the deviant’): the need for speed. The mapping materials then become the solution to the construction of the problem. Furthermore, the aim was not to review the material by comparing individual authors/producers. Rather, this material was analysed as a discursive element (Foucault, 1972, 2003) with a particular status in a discursive practice (‘a body of anonymous, historical rules, always determined in the time and
space that have defined a given period, and for a given social, economic, geographical, or linguistic area, the conditions of operation of the enunciative function’, Foucault, 1972, p. 117) governing the ECEC professionals as well as the children through its form and content in the larger disciplinary apparatus (Foucault, 1980) – an element among others woven into the ECEC discursive net of identification, examination, division, labelling, and intervention. The analysis required this questioning of what the material organised and presented, and in what way (Atkinson & Coffey, 2011).

The mapping materials (PM 1–12) included for the in-depth analysis are similar in form, structure, aim, and content. They have in common that they serve as documentation available to or commonly used in Swedish preschools, governing (and potentially governed by) the ECEC professionals by their structure, their specific focus, and their content and guidelines. The material comprises twelve documents. The included municipalities range from smaller to larger cities with a variety of public and private preschools. As mentioned, the analysis consists of a discursive textual analysis made in a thorough and qualitative way.

During both the general and in-depth analysis, I highlighted specific concepts and phrases that stood out as relevant and recurrent in the documents, bearing the research question in mind. I approached the analysis with a conscious theoretical lens but still an openness to contradiction and complexity. The textual concepts and phrases in the scrutinized documents were brought together into five themes, that flow from one to the next in a narrative style in the following section. The analytical points were illustrated with citations from the documents. The analysis was concluded with a synthesising bringing the themes together. The themes are viewed as parts of a discursive construction of truth which provide support for my main arguments of an interwoven fabric that constitutes the apparatus.

I have taken into consideration ethical research guidelines (Iphofen, 2020; Markham & Buchanan, 2012) and have followed the Research Council’s (2002, 2017) directives. As a critical educational researcher, I have striven for a credible and transparent analysis.

**Mapping in search of ‘the deviant’: the solution to a perceived problem**


**The architects and the authorities**

My search and analysis processes revealed a diversity of architects of the mapping materials, ranging from international EU actors down to a single preschool at the local level. The mapping materials were produced by a variety of preschool-related actors with varying degrees of closeness to the preschool practice, such as authorities, municipal representatives, private companies, publishing houses, and a wide range of cooperations between preschool staff and professionals, which included but was not limited to work teams, support teams, teachers, special educators, headmasters, and researchers. Examples at the international level include the *International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health* (13) enhanced by the WHO and *Inclusive Early*
Childhood Education Environment Self-Reflection (14) promoted by European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education; at the national level, they include advisory material from the Swedish National Agency for Education (15) and the National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools (16).

The material was either accessible and free of charge, open for anyone to download, or involved a cost. An example of the free material is the municipalities’ Pedagogical Mapping (PM 1–12). The non-free material included UNIKUM (17) (a material/digital program made by a private company within the Edtech-sector said to be used by more than 90 municipalities, unikum.net) and The Everyday Compass (18) or The Preschool Compass (19) (two written pamphlets with similar content). The latter is published by Gothia Kompetens AB (gothiakompetens.se); and promotes itself by the slogan/subtitle: For those who encounter children who have difficulty navigating.

Given this diversity of architects and authorities (see Foucault, 1972, 1980) described above, it is particularly interesting to follow the prominent similarities and perceptions that are emphasised in the different documents (1–19) in the ECEC apparatus (Foucault, 1972; Foucault, 1977, 1980). A document could appear on more than one arena; for instance, some documents appeared both on different municipal homepages and, slightly revised, on state authorities’ websites such as the Swedish National Agency for Education and the National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools. The discursive elements are thus interconnected with each other in the machinery of documentality (Ferraris, 2007, 2009, 2013; see also Foucault, 2003).

The analysis also shows similarities between municipalities, for example, the same text appearing partly or fully in the Pedagogical Mapping material. From a Foucauldian perspective, this is an example of how the identificatory documents have nailed themselves into the flesh or corpus of society, an elevated element in the larger apparatus: they are apparently spread within and between different arenas in society, operating together at different levels and communicating a special message to the retrievers.

The twelve Pedagogical Mapping documents are available on the websites of various municipalities (PM 1–12). Accordingly, with reference to Foucault, the mapping material is sanctioned and given a specific status, so it can be thought of as an elevated document in the quality discourse operating on the municipal level, probably both within and between municipalities. There is no legislation connected to the use of specific documents in preschool on any levels as far as the analysis has shown (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2018b, b). However, the Pedagogical Mapping document (PM 1–12) is not presented with any alternatives on the websites and can therefore be regarded as specifically promoted by the respective municipality. Thus, the document can be regarded as a kind of policy document, which is enhanced by the fact that the document commonly has the municipal logo printed on it at the left corner of the first page. This particular document has a notably wide range, considering the number of preschools a municipality could comprise. The retrievers can be children, parents, preschool staff, teachers in different school forms or levels, following the individual through, if not a life span, at least a bit on the path. Therefore, the in-depth analysis that follows concentrated on this particular document.

To sum up, an overall analysis of all the initially included documents (1–19, see Material and Analytical Strategy) raised the questions of who the architects behind them are and which authorities are promoting them. There is no overall univocal
legislation behind the documents. Instead, there is a friendly power-exercising (Foucault, 1977, 1980) policy-like air to them, with variations; they are presented as helpful guiding or supporting materials at different levels.

**The Name of the game**

The analysis show that all of the scrutinised documents (PM 1–12) on the municipal level contain a heading where the title *Pedagogical Mapping* is clearly marked at the beginning of the material. It is the first phrase that catches the eye of the reader/recipient of this document. The title is commonly marked with an enhanced font and a distinctive size, separating itself from the rest of the document. Although this may seem obvious and natural, and on a first glance not worth giving any extra consideration, when we problematise it from a Foucauldian perspective, this places the discursive meaning of the title (the name) itself in a special position – giving the document a specific status in a specific context, in a specific time, and in a specific place.

One can easily be led to believe that this is a neutral document (see also Ferraris, 2007, 2009, 2013). However, in line with Foucault (1977, 1980), this is not just any document. It has a special position. It is a document of power and of knowledge. It is a document that creates and manifests the truth. It is a document with aims and targets.

Firstly, it receives its status as an object of truth using the term *pedagogical* (PM 1–12) as the centre of what it is supposed to be: the number one-strategy, technique, or approach to fulfilling the mission by the professionals in early childhood education and care. It is not medical or psychiatric or even sociological or psychological; it is pedagogical.

Secondly, it receives its status from the nodal point *mapping* (PM 1–12). The concept *mapping* or *assessment/mapping* (PM 1–12) tells us that this document is going to provide a thorough investigation, a chart of something or someone, that depends upon the sharp, examining gaze, mind, and judgment of the teacher, the work group, or the special educator and their will to understand and produce knowledge that can describe and analyse different pieces put together.

The first part of the title is commonly either followed by *in preschool* or just *preschool*, attaching the document to the specific ECEC place: the preschool, a neoliberal institution established and regulated as the first step in the educational system. Alternatively, the child could be mentioned in the latter part of this initial heading: *Mapping of the child’s development, Preschool* (PM 8) or *Mapping of children in preschool* (e.g. PM 1, 4, 12). This linguistic variation is worth noting, since the latter focuses on the child rather than on the development.

The *Pedagogical Mapping* operates as a catalyst for further actions, where you need to highlight whether the mapping should result in an action plan or in other measures (e.g. PM 1, 2, 6, 8, 10).

The mapping must also be used to give structure to observations and reflections and form the basis for continued efforts in the pedagogical work. The entire pedagogical mapping, or a summary of it, can then be used as a basis for the possible establishment of an action plan.

(PM 1)
It forms a basis for a possible action program. (PM 3)
The pedagogical mapping is the basis for any further efforts such as action plans.
(PM 4)
The child health team’s decision on intervention

(a) An action plan is drawn up at the organizational, group, or individual level
(b) Other input (e.g. tutoring, speech therapist, CCC, habilitation, etc.)
(c) The case is closed (PM 6)

As stated above, the analysis of the twelve documents (PM 1–12) on the municipal level shows the elevated status the specific mapping document has gained. From a Foucauldian perspective, this specific document could be interpreted as a truth-producing document of power and knowledge which legitimises the search and identification of ‘the deviant’ within the preschool institutional frames. From the name of the game, we move on to the designated drivers.

Directing the designated driver

The analysis indicates that the subjects who are supposed to fill out the Pedagogical Mapping documents play a particular role in the educational apparatus of ECEC as the vehicles of the identificatory power (Foucault, 1973/2003, 1977, 2000). According to Foucault (1982/2000 we are all subjects in this discursive machinery, which the analysis of the empirical material exemplifies. These designated drivers (with the need for speed), directed by the pre-defined headings and demand for signatures, can be regarded as a central part of a subtle yet governing regime of power (e.g. Foucault, 1980). Examples of these pre-defined headings include the following:

Child development regarding:

Play/cognitive development:
Social Abilities:
Language and communication:
Motor skills:
(PM 8)

Description of the child/pupil in the preschool/school:

Cognition, thought processes, perception, memory
Speech, language, communication and mother tongue
Emotional functioning
Social functioning and social skills
Gross and fine motor skills
(PM 12)

Social competence - interaction with others, initiative, empathetic ability, security, well-being, participation and influence, critical thinking, reflective ability
(PM 11)

The child's contact with other children and adults
Ability to take instructions in a group and as an individual
Ability to listen
Speaks so that others understand (PM 10)
The examples above show how the power of the norm operates in this disciplinary system by governing through comparing human behaviours, actions, and achievements (Foucault, 1977). This is an exercise that one does not easily refrain from if one wants to position oneself as the good, highly competent teacher, special educator, or the like. One can, hypothetically, make resistance; however, it comes with a cost in the relational network of power (Foucault, 1977, 1980). Professionals at different levels of the preschool organisation – from childcare givers and the work team as a whole to principals and school leaders, as well as officials and politicians – may all be regarded as a part of this apparatus (or machinery, if you will) (Foucault, 1972, 1976, 1977, 1980), continuously (re)producing the boundaries of (un)appropriate behaviour and (lack of) knowledge when identifying ‘the deviant’ (Foucault, 1977).

The demand for signatures from parents, special educators, teachers, or principals at the top end of several of the Pedagogical Mapping (e.g. PM 3, 5, 7, 10, 12) materials become a guarantee of approval and alliance between the guardians and the education representatives, emphasising the power working within and between the documents (see Ferraris, 2007, 2009, 2013; Foucault, 1980).

Signature of pedagogically responsible preschool teacher. Name and date.
(PM 3)
Signature of guardian. Signature of guardian.
Signature of preschool director. Signature of educator.
(PM 1)

**Signature**

Place and date
Responsible pedagogue Signature
Responsible special educator Signature
(PM 8)

Foucault (1977) describes societal institutions and processes that include hierarchical surveillance and examination which divide individuals, identify deviations, and determine levels of merit, competence, and skills. The empirical examples above arguably serve such functions.

To sum up, according to Foucault (1980), power has intentions and aims. He also stresses that ‘individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application’ (p. 98). The individuals involved in the various parts of the documentational practices of the ECEC are viewed in this very spirit, which is highlighted in different ways above. The next section continues to address the way the designated drivers are governed by the documents.

**The fixation of the identificatory and registering gaze**

The machinery of power (Foucault, 1972, 1976, 1977, 1980) works its way through the identificatory and registering gaze (Foucault, 1973/2003, 1977) of the intended designate drivers. The bold headings in the documents (PM 1–12) appear as an unquestionable matter of fact: this is the appropriate way of addressing the perceived problem. According
to several of the scrutinised documents, to pinpoint the outlier – ‘the deviant’ – the identificatory and registering gaze needs to address three different levels: the individual level, group level, and organisation level (e.g. PM 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11).

In addition, the same and other documents also fixate the identificatory gaze towards the child based on different skills and abilities such as physical and psychological health, fine and gross motor skills, relations and social interplay, language and communication skills, attention, perception, concentration, cognitive abilities, and so forth (e.g. PM 1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8,10). With this approach, the Pedagogical Mapping material governs towards registering not only the body but also the mind of the child. A couple of documents even seek for the child’s personality to be registered. For example, one document contained the following heading: ‘The child’s personality and other matters of importance’ (headline, PM 8)

It becomes unclear as to why the so-called personality should be registered, and what this knowledge should result in. There are very few connections to pedagogical strategies (see below). Instead, the mapping material may contain instructions and assistance for the ones who are supposed to fill out the form (i.e. the designated drivers) by directing their attention towards specific areas in terms of (lack of) abilities or skills and exemplifying what is to be assessed:

**Skills/Cognitive abilities**
Perception: sight, smell, hearing, taste, touch (PM 7)

**Motor skills**
Gross and fine motor skills, posture and muscle tone, balance (PM 7)

A few of the documents contain subjects, such as mathematics, natural science, and technology, or general curriculum related (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2018a) goals dichotomically divided into theoretical and practical issues.

**Mathematics** - see context, logical thinking, creativity, solve problems, understanding of basic properties such as time, quantity, number, order (setting the table, sorting, playing games, etc.) (PM 11)

**General pre-school issues (theoretical and practical)**
Describe the preschool child in relation to the aspirational goals in the preschool curriculum. (PM 12)

The examples above show which aspects are promoted in the mappable territory (Foucault, 1973/2003). The analysis raises questions on whether it is an established knowledge or lack thereof in the child that is supposed to be documented or the pedagogical processes of the designated drivers or other ECEC professionals that should be the focus since the document is named pedagogical mapping. Although there are some examples of the latter, most of the directions (given through pre-set highlighted headings and written examples) are of the former type, instrumentalising (see Moss, 2017) what could be regarded as too complex to capture in a document.

Other techniques of the identification process include situations such as outdoor environment, hallway situation, meals, toilet situation, gathering, and pick up and drop off by the parents. This tells us not only that routines are important to master as a child in
preschool but also which ones in particular, to avoid being identified as ‘the deviant’ in initial special education practices in ECEC.

In the scrutinised documents, the designated drivers are prompted to make normalising judgements and assessments (Foucault, 1977) of the individual child (exemplified above) in preschool regarding everything from toilet visits to mathematical and social skills. As seen above, the child is to be measured and assessed in terms of skills and abilities, or rather the lack thereof.

The document users, the designated drivers, are to examine (Foucault, 1977) the child inside and out (PM 1–12), even with the intention of broadening their point of view from focusing only on the individual to including pedagogical, social, or physical aspects, using concepts such as environment (PM 8), organisation (PM 11), climate in the group (PM 7), methods (PM 9), and more. For example, the child is the object of attention at different levels in several of the mapping materials.

Describe the child’s . . . (PM 4)
Mapping of the child in its context (PM 3)
The child’s development and learning (PM 5)

The designated drives are also to compare the child with others.

It is important that it is clear where the child is in its development in relation to other children. (PM 10)

Why it is be important to compare children becomes unclear and questionable, not at least in relation to ECEC steering documents.

Even though the mapping material is commonly named pedagogical, the analysis shows, with few exceptions, that there is in fact not much that could constitute a pedagogy in the way the documents are put together (PM 1–12). When the child is fixated upon as described above, alternative ways of understanding are ignored. For example, a few directions regarding pedagogy, pedagogical strategies or the like were found (see above).

To sum up, the analysis has visibilised some of the assumptions behind this mapping document described above. What is then the underlying problem, if not the child? Even if this cannot be expressed outright, ‘the deviant’ is produced through the identificatory mapping materials that operate in Swedish preschools’ daily practice. In this context, it could be fruitful to ask, what unintended but possibly harmful consequences could this document(ality) result in? (See also Rose, 2006, 2007; Rose & Abi-Rached, 2013) And could the solution be anything other than intervening for high returns? (See also Ball, 2009; Krejsler, 2012; Moss, 2017)

**The winner takes it all: high returns**

This final section of the analysis ties together the narrative presented above and suggests an answer to the question of which truth or reality is produced through the mapping materials. The different documents included in the overall analysis (see *The Architects and the Authorities*) (re)appear on different societal levels, and in the way they are presented, as if they were objective or neutral documents (see *The Name of the Game*) that reflect ‘reality’, when they actually, within this poststructural and agentic perspective
(Ferraris, 2007, 2009, 2013), contribute to creating and producing it as a part of the apparatus, or machinery, described by Foucault (1972, 1976, Foucault, 1977, 1980).

The identification processes are perhaps made to improve things for the individual, but they can also be regarded as a means to gain a higher position (see Directing the Designated Driver). Namely, they could serve as a means for both municipalities and the nation to climb the ranks as having schools labelled as ‘the best preschool’, ‘the number one school municipality’. It raises the nation’s standing in international measurements and rankings – resulting in high returns (Moss, 2017) in the political and financial game, where Sweden can additionally maintain its status as a global model and its reputation as a successful ‘knowledge nation’. That is, the high returns may appear on local, municipal, national, and global levels. In line with this view, ‘the deviant’, the outlier, must be identified and fixed (See The Fixation of the Identificatory and Registering Gaze).

However, the way in which a problem is posed has probably built-in consequences. This documentality (Ferraris, 2007, 2009, 2013; see also Foucault, 2003) most likely leaves an imprint in the child and in childhood. This analysis has shown that while it can be seen as positive, productive, helpful, and natural, it can also be harmful and not without consequences (see also, Davies, 1995; Franck, 2014; Lutz, 2009; Markström & Alasuutari, 2011; Palla, 2011, 2018; Palla & Sjögren, 2022; Schmidt, 2014; Snyder & Mitchell, 2006; Strømme, 2019).

**A (Con)temporary sign of the Times: what, then, is next?**

Foucault (1977) describes societal institutions and processes that include the hierarchical surveillance and examination that divide individuals; identify deviations; and determine levels of merit, competence, and skills (See also Snyder & Mitchell, 2006). Mapping materials used in preschools arguably serve a similar function. One can easily conceptualise how the preschool becomes a differentiating discursive practice (Foucault, 2000) depending on the mapping materials it uses. In relation to the preschool being part of a governing disciplinary system, Foucault (1977) believes that a disciplinary power has a disjunctive, analysing, and differentiating effect on individuals. Since children who are identified through the mapping materials currently used in preschools might be ranked in terms of their need for special education, the mapping materials (with their identificatory aim) become a catalyst for (further) actions. It is not farfetched to believe that these further actions, which have been legitimised by the results of the mapping materials, are also governed to be interventional, corrective, and normalising rather than pedagogical. Thus, they clash with the educare ideals long promoted as synonymous with the preschool form in Nordic countries. These actions also clash with the current legislation and curriculum in Swedish preschool (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2018b, b). Foucault (1977) argues that the apparatus is in fact interventional and corrective; accordingly, the apparatus seizes the entire child. The study, in line with previous research, has shown how this medicalized western special education logic (see e.g. Mitchell et al., 2019; Slee et al., 1998; Snyder & Mitchell, 2006) is creeping into Nordic ECEC logics. This raises concerns with both psychological, sociological, and pedagogical connotations. For example, what value base and view of the human in large and the young child in particular is prominent in this logic? What effects might it cause regarding well-being, identity, self-esteem and sense of self on an individual level, and what society
is shaped and maintained on a societal level? Finally, which pedagogy is brought to the fore, and which one is silenced when so much effort is put in to the identification mission?

I have provided a poststructural perspective on how documentation (mapping material) as a discursive element of an apparatus of early childhood special education identification processes in Sweden has become fruitful for visibilising, comparing, and assessing the child and for further governing, which, I have argued, is problematic. The identification of ‘the Deviant’ as the Ultimate Goal for High Returns in ECEC becomes salient when analysing the documents’ pre-existing structure, content, and proposed purpose.

In line with the literature presented above, I have also pointed out the unrealistic status that the document(s) have gained in the global ECEC quality discourse – a (con) temporary sign of our times (see also Beneke & Love, 2022; Erixon & Erixon Arreman, 2017; Krejsler, 2012; Ozga et al., 2011; Palla, 2021; Piattoeva, 2018). In addition, I have also argued how the understanding of human behaviours becomes simplified if it is understood exclusively from an individual perspective in relation to proposed internal deficiencies in a document (see also, Palla, 2021) or based on universal measures enhancing instrumentality, and conformity (Moss, 2017).

There is a long tradition in Sweden of promoting the preschool as having a value of its own – with educare and the child’s interest and wellbeing ‘here and now’ being at the centre, along with the opportunity for the child to learn, develop, and thrive. The identification processes present in the scrutinised mapping materials could operate in another direction. The current analysis as well as the outlined previous research (e.g. Franck & Nilsen, 2015; Heiskanen et al., 2018; Lutz, 2009; Palla, 2011, 2018) highlight the risks and consequences created by the way the material is put forward and the documentation is practiced.

This identificatory gaze can be both productive and dehumanising – subjectifying those who are the target of (in the current case) the mapping, especially if the child is reduced to no more than an educable subject and not a person with all its nuances. When classifying, dividing, and differentiating children become the foreground and when the complexities in which the child is interwoven constitute the background, downplayed or silenced, the power is exercised effectively and becomes the excuse for intervening the disturbing elements. This reasoning, of course, relates to the perception of normality and deviance.

I argue that the education system is not in an immediate hurry. Hence, there is no need for such speed in identifying ‘the youngest deviants’ as the ultimate goal for high returns in ECEC – if the purpose really is to promote wellbeing, security, and learning (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2018b, b) instead of glowing in transnational competitions and comparisons, winning political status, and maintaining a reputation as a knowledge nation (e.g. OECD, 2017) (see also Krejsler, 2012; Slee et al., 1998).

In brief, this study has given an alternative understanding of early childhood special education identification processes. Further, I have examined and hopefully expanded the understanding of the practice of documentation and documents in an ongoing documentality era. A perspective that looks beyond individual deficiency can expose the impossibility of correcting all children’s perceived ‘deviations’ as quickly and efficiently as possible and, in the long run, of normalising children on their path through the
educational system. ECEC would clearly benefit from more complexity-acknowledging, more ethical, and more fluid documentation and educational approaches, where human differences are not seen as threats, lacks, or failures but rather as opportunities for development and change.

I have also argued for the necessity to create ongoing opportunities for preschool professionals and stakeholders to reflect on the aforementioned issues on a deeper level, one in which educational contexts and relations are more visible and taken into consideration in a more profound way with regard to mapping and identification. Furthermore, there is a societal and educational need to address the impact of documents and documentation practices and to recognise them as agentic forces, especially if we regard them as institutional objects (Ferraris, 2009) which have the power to define, preserve, and leave traces (see also Ferraris, 2007, 2013). Finally, since it is beyond the scope of this study to explore these issues in more depth, future research is needed to elaborate on the question of who benefits from the focus on documentality in education. The way these mapping materials actually enhance inequality and potentially cause harm, rather than the opposite, is also in need of further investigation.

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Notes on contributor

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