“How are my students supposed to learn anything when they are hungry?”

Different approaches to curricula and teaching in preschools of varied socio economic capital in Mumbai, India.

Amira Wiander
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Abstract

This paper is based on a study conducted in Mumbai, India, regarding how early education is organized in the absence of a national curriculum for the pre-primary education and how the quality of the teaching seems to be affected. The purpose was to learn what actors in education believe is important for child development and how that differs in schools with different socio-economical capital. To gain this knowledge, qualitative interviews with teachers and principals were conducted to outline what they find important in their schools, what they wish to develop and change and how they assess their work. The respondents are working in schools very different from each other and the answers were accordingly.

Conclusions are that in schools with students of favorable socio economical situation, a progressive approach including play and a child-centered teaching was used in contrast to schools of low socio-economical standard where a traditional take on education was in place, making students school ready through focusing on reading and writing skills. Spirituality, religion and manners were brought to the researchers’ attention as important aspects in education for the respondents, which mirror the cultural environment of India. The decentralized school system and the lack of a legislated national curriculum do not benefit disadvantaged children. An expansion of high-quality Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) in India is suggested as well a progressive approach to teaching with play incorporated.

Keywords
Preschool, Curriculum, Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), Pierre Bourdieu, India, Mumbai.
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Preface

Being a teaching student majoring in early education, it is of outmost importance to understand what core values you stand for and how these mirror your perception of the world. I want to be able to pass on a permissive, inclusive and accepting attitude to my students.

For that reason, amongst others, I grasped the opportunity to travel to India to write my thesis and through the experience maybe broaden my own perspective on what good education can be and which different challenges there are. Furthermore, I wanted to gain a deeper understanding of different living conditions, cultures and what is being valued in a different schooling system.

This study was made possible through the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) financed program Minor Field Studies (MFS) that allows Swedish university students to establish and strengthen international connections and to further work in a global setting. MFS issues grants to enable data collection for your thesis in a developing country and provides a preparatory course before leaving.

Many thanks to my supervisors at Stockholm University, Sara Andersson and Camilla Rindstedt, who with patience and valuable advice helped me throughout my work. To my dear mentor and advisor in India, Vijaya Murthy, whom I wish to thank for the help and guidance, the warm welcome in India and assistance during the collection of the data, I am truly grateful. Without her, I could not have finished the study. And thanks to Vijaya, I now have a great love for India, which I can never thank her enough for. And of course my informants, I am deeply appreciative for the time put in to make this research possible.
Introduction

The immediate and “natural” environments in which young children develop and learn are those of the family and community. These may be more, or less, supportive of development and the degree of support does not necessarily correspond to or depend on material well being. But even in more supportive home environments, it may not be possible to respond in the most appropriate way to all of a child’s basic needs so that a child can develop his or her potential to the maximum (Myers, 2004, p. 5).

This is where the preschool and educational system emerges. The aim throughout this study is to understand what teachers and principals choose to focus on within their schools and how that affects the quality of the education. Furthermore, there is an interest in asking why and how they follow up on their goals.

Since there is no mandatory national curriculum for the preschool in India it is interesting to outline what local teachers and principals in different schools considers important and what needs to be developed. All ideas and pedagogies that are working in the western world are not guaranteed to be prosperous in all parts of the world, which makes this even more interesting. When there are no national requirements per se, there is no need for assessment to control that said requirements are being fulfilled and the process of development can never be as distinct and visible to the educators and actors involved. Since assessments are directly affecting future developmental changes and it reveals who is allowed to affect those changes being made, this was still part of the research.

An active choice to visit schools socioeconomically different from each other, made it relevant to compare how the differences affect the teaching, using Bourdieu’s term capital for the analysis.

The Indian context

India is often called the largest democracy in the world, and also one of the most diverse. The amount of religions, languages and the differences in social hierarchy makes India both very interesting and complex. India is a federation of 29 states that are governed by a local government in most questions where of education is one. A decentralized school system generates potentially large differences in quality in between the states but also allows the freedom to form the education accordingly, to suit the specific setting. The states do answer to the federal government when it comes to questions of currency, defense and foreign affairs to name a few (Landguiden, 2015).

This study has been conducted in the city of Mumbai, the capital of the state Maharashtra in west India and also the largest metropolitan in all of India. The population of Mumbai City is approximately 12.5 million whereof over 1 million are children below the age of six. The city has a literacy rate of approximately 90 % (Census, 2015).
There are many challenges when it comes to education in a city like Mumbai, for example; it has attracted a large number of uneducated, poor people who are unable to support their children academically (Juneja, 2001, p. 24). The possibility to find proper housing in Mumbai is non-existing for people without large funding which is one of the reasons that half of the population live in slum areas. The slums are often with substandard facilities when it comes to plumbing and electricity and most people living there are extremely poor (Gupta, Arnold & Lhungdim, 2009, ss. 21, 35). When one of the educators interviewed spoke about the living conditions of some of her students, it was an eye-opener to a very real dilemma; “How are my students supposed to learn anything when they are hungry?” With this in mind, how can schools secure a good learning environment for all children?

Another issue for the underprivileged children is the lack of early literacy experiences. In a Canadian study, conducted over 5 years, it has emerged that exposure to literacy experiences in small children directly affects their ability to read and write later on in primary school (Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002, pp. 445-460).

In 2012 a draft for a national curriculum was made by the Ministry of Women and Child Development where it is stated that up until the outlining of this document it was feared that a curriculum would decrease the possibility of an individualized learning environment (Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2012). “Each program is expected to develop its own curriculum to meet the needs of its children, their families, the specific setting, the linguistic culture and the local community. However, the programs should be based on the curriculum principles and guidelines laid down in this framework.” (2012, p. 5). The draft for the national curriculum states what a curriculum for holistic development must contain, from physical, motor and sensorial development to language and numeric development, cognitive, social and creative development (pp. 7-8). There is also a strong and continuous emphasis on play all through the curriculum. All these are considered guidelines but no one that was interviewed throughout the study mentioned this curriculum. Even though play is such an important factor in learning when it comes to the young children (Prochner, 2006, p. 447) in researching and interviewing for this thesis, play rarely comes up as a natural part of teaching or it is not mentioned at all. There is plenty of research backing the statement of the importance of play, but still it is set-aside in so many cases. This will be discussed further under Previous Research.

System of education in India

In India there is a tradition of caring for the first years of a child's life by reinforcing traditions and basic values by the family, and particularly the mother. These basic values are called sanskaras and are considered the foundation of education (NCERT, 2006, p. 4). Through societal changes such as an increase in female employment, the responsibility of carrying on the tradition is moved from the family to institutions (Kesharwani, 2012, p. 58).

Since 2010 early education has been compulsory for children aged 6-14 after The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (RTE) came into effect which also states that children ages 3-6 should be prepared for school. It states that;

..with a view to prepare children above the age of three years for elementary education and to provide early childhood care and education for all children until they complete
the age of six years, the appropriate Government may make necessary arrangement for providing free pre-school education for such children (Das & Kundu, 2014, p. 6).

Despite the aspiration of delivering free education from the age of three, schooling is not free nor available to all children of India (Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2012, p. 5). A probable explanation is that pre-primary education has not yet been legislated in India and is therefore not controlled by any regulatory body (Devarakonda, 2013, p. 120).

Early education in India is covered by three sectors, the public, private and by the Non-governmental organizations (NGO). The public sector covers 22% of children age 0-6 and the private sector is considered to be the second largest provider of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) but with no accurate number, it is estimated to be slightly smaller than the public sector. ECCE does not only provide education but also nutritional- and health support for women and children, making it an important institution for public health as well as equal, basic education. The third sector, the NGO, is also without accurate figures and the smallest one. (NCERT, 2006, p. 12) A reason for the lack of data could be the numerous forms of different programs; “Anganwadis (...), crèches, play groups/schools, preschools, nursery schools, kindergartens, preparatory schools, balwadis, home based care” and also a lack of control and cooperation in between different institutions (Ministry of Women and Child Development, 2012, p. 6).

Multiple projects regarding education and early education have been developed, more or less successfully. One that turned out with a good result is the Pratham project. Balwadis in the slums were created at multiple locations around the city. The goal was to universalize education for all children and that the children within the program would reach goals agreed upon by the government of Maharashtra and UNICEF (Chavan, 2000, p. 21). In these balwadis children could interact, play, sing and so forth. The assigned instructors were young women with no, or a little, education (2000, p. 29). The Pratham project is still educating children and contributing to the development of the community of low-income families.

The private sector is mainly providing early education for wealthy families through demanding a high fee that many less fortunate families could never pay. This is exempted by the 25% of places that private schools are required to reserve for children from disadvantaged families, which became mandatory through RTE (NCERT, 2006, p. 11). Whether the schools follow the demand or not is not within my knowledge and did not show in the data collection, nor did I focus on it.

In all the cases observed in this study, the preschool, or the pre-primary section is set within the premises of the school and therefore most children continue on to the primary level in the same school.

The Indian preschools visited were divided into three standards according to the observations: nursery, junior kindergarten and senior kindergarten whereas the nursery holds children from approximately three years of age. The children stay for one year in each standard. In general, a day in the preschool lasts for four hours, one hour give or take. Apart from the preschool, there is in most schools even a playschool where children can spend the day if the parents are not able to care for them after preschool hours. The playschool is not considered as educational but rather institutionalized babysitting.
Within the city there is a large linguistic diversity, which requires resources in the form of teachers speaking the native tongue of the children. As many as eight languages are offered in primary education (not pre-primary), such as Marathi, Gujarati, Hindi, English and Kannada to mention a few (Juneja, 2001, p. 52).

Previous research

In India and Mumbai there are wide gaps between the disadvantaged and the most fortunate in economic as well as in sociocultural aspects. This lays the foundation for the differences in early childhood programs. There are municipal schools and preschools for the poor, municipal schools that are funded by organizations for the middle class and private schools for the upper class. For the most disadvantaged children that live in slum areas there have not been any early education programs up until 1945 when the first balwadi was founded. Currently there are multiple balwadis, often run without any support from the government by women who work voluntary and by NGO's where committed teachers really can make a difference for those children (Amis, 2001, p. 110).

When looking at how education is organized, one will also look at the quality of the teaching when assessing what students learn and how well they develop. What the standard of a good quality program is can however differ depending on the country and area. Nirmala Rao (2010) confirms this in saying that the standards of quality set in the Western world can rarely be reached in developing countries as a result of the lack of resources. The education for disadvantaged children is also often terribly poor according to Western benchmarks. In the article Preschool Quality and the Development of Children from Economically Disadvantaged Families in India (2010), Rao claims that the early education programs still shows signs of increasing the development in children of disadvantaged families. This is based on a small-scale study conducted in northern India where the quality of the program correlated to the development of the children. Especially for these children in the developing world it is important to get access to early education in order to develop and thrive in school later on (Rao, 2010). In all of India, the disadvantaged children add up to the number of 65 million.

There are many voices around the world that vouch for an integrated, play-way, theme based preschool education and one of the people examining this is Larry Prochner. He reviewed curricular differences in India and tried to outline the history of play-way teaching in early education. He asked why there are so few preschools utilizing play in contrast to formal instruction-based teaching when many working with early education in different arenas (government, universities, NGO-s) are enhancing the positive outcomes of a play-way based learning (2006, p. 310). Play-way teaching can be explained by the study of Michnick Golinkoff, Hirsh-Pasek & Singer (2006, p. 3-6). They found that through incorporating play in the curriculum, it has shown that students learn easier. Playing with words in songs, chants and rhymes makes literacy awareness come naturally and facilitates reading and writing. Through physical play, there are more benefits than the pure physical release. It has been
shown that when children play together they learn how to cooperate in other settings as well, for example when working together in school (Michnick Golinkoff et al.).

UNESCO has also examined the same area of teaching and concludes; "Other reasons are the poor quality of the school experience, and the lack of relevance of school learning to children’s lives. Overcrowding and a shortage of textbooks are part of the normal school experience for most children. The average pupil to teacher ratio in India is 64:1 (UNESCO, 1996). The high ratio is supported by adult-centered teaching methods that leave little room for learning through play.” (p. 305).

There seems to be a couple of reasons for the lack of play-way teaching and instead a large focus on making children school-ready. The high student to teacher ratio is obstructing teaching on a play-way basis with the interests of the children as the foundation of education, where the teacher does not exercise as much control as in a traditional school setting. In addition to this, the parents also prefer more formal instruction because there tends to be “... a lack of confidence in play-way to prepare children for teacher-directed test-oriented primary schools.” (Prochner, 2006, p. 310).

Prochner writes:

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\text{The main function of the preschool education component is to stimulate and satisfy the curiosity of the child rather than following any rigid learning curriculum. Children are taught songs and games.’ However, ‘since there is no formally structured curriculum, and flexibility is encouraged, the anganwadi often responds to parental demands to teach the alphabet and elementary numeracy. (Prochner, 2006, p. 311)}
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So even though it has been shown that there are positive outcomes of a play oriented learning, teachers are not able to utilize it within their curriculum (Michnick Golinkoff et al., 2006).

Another source stating similar thoughts of education is Neelima Chopra who says that she has found evidence that learning that is child initiated, based on the interests of the child, gives positive effects long term on achievements in school and even in social behavior. The traditional preschools, with a strict focus on academic skills have shown to have better immediate effect on cognitive skills, but the more progressive ones focusing not only on academics but on over all development shows positive outcomes in long-term studies of “educational and social adjustments” (Chopra, 2012, p. 162). Chopra cites Schweinhart and Weikarts study on poor children’s developmental outcome based on different curriculum models. “These findings argue (...) for using a well-defined curriculum model based on child-initiated learning activities” (Schweinhart & Weikarts, p. 116). The developmental benefits of attending an early childhood program has been explained by many, but Schweinhart and Weikarts stress the importance of the quality within the program, and that curriculum seems to be the most important denominator.

The political system will also influence the way the curriculum is organized, and since education is not governed on a federal level by a national curriculum, the quality will be of varied kind which I will explain closer under theoretical framework.

Importance of a high quality school program is even more important for children from deprived urban settings, as Mumbai. Rekha Radhakrishnan states

Urban poverty and its characteristics like substandard housing, overcrowding, poor water, sanitation and sewage disposal facilities, related environmental risks including eviction of
slum dwellers are all issues that had been discussed far and wide. But as professionals working in the field of child development, our understandings of the underlying complex causative processes, possible effects and implication of these issues on the slum children’s development is still inadequate.

Child labor, probably the only means of survival for many poor urban households, is often at the expense of the health of the children and their schooling, thus creating a vicious cycle of poverty, illiteracy and unemployment, trapping even the next generation in to poverty. (Nair & Rekha Radhakrishnan, 2004, p. 227)

Aim and research questions

This study focuses on development and implementation of early childhood programs in the absence of a mandatory national curriculum. The questions of research aim to understand which developmental goals are being set when there are no specific directions that needs to be followed as an addition to what educators find important in education for young children. Through asking questions about what educators appreciate about their own practice and how they wish to develop this said practice it will be possible to form an understanding of what is given importance in the various schools. Since all developmental goals are not set by the staff but rather by the economy of the school, there must be an aspect of the socio economical conditions which also leads to the question of what difference the symbolic capital makes.

When using the term *educators*, I refer to all actors working with education within the premises of the school such as teachers, principals, headmistresses, counselors and coordinators.

As a sub-purpose I am researching the way the different programs are being assessed. Knowing if and how they are assessing their practice will provide information on how they are forming the preschool education and who is given power to affect the education.

My research questions are:

- What are educators in preschools of Mumbai prioritizing within their program when there is no legislated national curriculum for pre-primary education and how does that affect the quality of the teaching?
- Are there differences in the quality of the teaching depending on the socio-economic conditions?
- Do educators assess their program and in which way?

The study will include different schools in multiple areas, some where the students enrolled come from families of high symbolic and economical capital, some with students from middle class families and some that are poor.
Theoretical framework

Analyzing and comparing the different preschools by using the theoretical framework of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu regarding capital is an attempt to understand the underlying processes, which form the culture of a school regarding which students they admit as well as what and how they teach. The concepts considered applicable are; symbolic capital, cultural capital, educational capital and economical capital.

To analyze the contents of education within the preschool, a different tool is needed, theories of curricula (Linde, 2012). The concepts relevant for this study are catalogue learning, analogue learning and dialogue learning as well as looking into what centralized curricula is in contrast to decentralized curricula and how that affects the education.

The term Bourdieu calls capital has several dimensions and is explained by Broady (1998, p. 9) as symbolic and materialistic assets that are valued by social groups, or “what is recognized” (authors translation). The symbolic assets are the ones that Bourdieu was interested in defining. The term symbolic capital is very broad and can be understood as resources that are highly regarded and valued in social groups. Symbolic capital ranges from speech patterns and gestures to a prestigious employment or a piece of art, that all gain, or make the person in possession of those attributes gain, instant trust and respect.

Cultural capital is perhaps the most important category of capital according to Bourdieu, and serves as a narrower subdivision to symbolic capital. If a specific type of symbolic capital is valued higher than other forms of symbolic capital by a large number of groups in society, and especially the dominating one, it becomes cultural capital. Being able to express oneself in writing or orally, possessing a highly valued degree or title could all be considered to give the owner a rich cultural capital. Broady also explains cultural capital as the opposite of economical assets. "If you are part of the upper-class but do not own any money, what do you own?” (author’s translation). Cultural capital can be accumulated in other ways than through heritage and most commonly through education (Broady, 1998).

Bourdieu also specifies educational or academic capital as its own category, a product of cultural capital inherited combined with the cultural transmission from the school. The possibility to accumulate educational capital can also be affected by one’s cultural capital, since teachers value students differently depending on how similar their capital is to their own, thus being able to express oneself academically could be premièred in school in contrast to a student with another set of linguistic skills, not familiar with high status culture (Broady, 1998).

Social capital can be explained as the connections and social network in the form of family relations and friendships that a person has. Social capital is different from cultural capital since it is gained through the relations between individuals within the same group, thus benefitting the whole group (Broady, 1998).

Within the field of curriculum theory there are distinctions between curricula that are centralized and decentralized depending on the political system. Since India is a federation, the states are free to decide how education should be organized. Linde (2012, p. 77-78) describes a centralized curriculum as a very controlled one, into the smallest details and
without room for interpretation by the educators. The control can grow to the extent that the teachers' role can be compared purely to a regulatory body, controlling that the students have received the desired understanding of the certain message. The desired information need not only reach its messenger but the receiver should also be able to repeat the information correctly. This is clearly a simplification but is used as a common and important tool in creating a unified nation. Since this is not the case in India, there might not be a need for a centralized curriculum in early education. What defines a decentralized curriculum is the lack of strict boundaries and a greater variation within all areas for example lesson planning, tradition of teaching and child perspective.

Lars-Owe Dahlgren in Linde (2012, pp. 101-102) distinguishes three forms of knowledge based on types of learning; catalogue learning, analogue learning and dialogue learning (translated by the author). These three types of learning are the tools I will use to analyze how educators view learning and what they are giving importance and what they are allowing within the framework of early education.

In catalogue learning, knowledge can be regarded as a schedule of phenomena in our external environment. Catalogue learning is based on remembering, memorizing and repeating facts without needing a deeper understanding for the phenomena regarded and is therefore hard to remember in the long run. It is a short-term way of learning. Catalogue teaching does not demand much from the teacher; the main requirement is to transfer facts from one person to another. There is no need to challenge the students to think for themselves, to strive to understand or to argue and compare the facts given. Catalogue knowledge is the foundation that analogue learning stands on.

After acquiring catalogue knowledge about a phenomenon, it can be processed to create an understanding there of, using previously known facts and adding new knowledge to give meaning to the unknown. “By using what is known to approach the unknown, giving meaning to the parts through the whole.” (Dahlgren, lecture). It is based on reflection and an understanding between cause and effect, contrasting catalogue learning where only repeating of facts is required. Dahlgren states that through analogue teaching, the catalogue knowledge sticks better. When reaching dialogue knowledge, one is able to exchange information and understanding required. Dialogue teaching consists to a large extent of communication with and between both counterparts and also the surrounding environment. These three types of learning can be analyzed separately as well as in the form of a process which starts with catalogue learning and knowledge, develops through analogue learning into analogue knowledge which can be used in the final dialogue learning.

The hidden curriculum includes elements such as patience and discipline and other rules of manners and courtesy specific for the culture, both of the society and even of the school in question (Linde, p. 19).
Methodology

Choice of methodology

This study was conducted mainly through qualitative interviews and minor field observations. Interviews were a useful tool since the personal thoughts and experiences on development and learning of the chosen interviewees are the focus of the study. By conducting interviews instead of surveys for example, it is possible to get closer to the subject and to get a deeper understanding of the issues at hand (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The interviews were used to collect data on the respondents’ professional view on development in education and what assessments are being made as well as the socio-economical conditions at the school and for the families of the students.

By collecting data through interviews, the risk of error in the respondents’ answers must be considered. Personal relations and trust are factors that can prevent the errors from occurring. The cultural differences and the asymmetry in power are factors as well which will be brought up later on in the text (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

As an addition to the interviews, field observations and written field notes were gathered during the visit at the schools and will be used in the study. These notes contain information regarding the size of the school, number of children in each class, teacher per child ratio and tuition fees et cetera. During the visits in the classrooms only a few notes were taken since observations are not the primary base of the study. One of the interviews in School 4 was conducted as a group interview with three teachers, on their request. When choosing the methodology of interviewing I used Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) as my main source.

Selections and limitations

The chosen interviewees are representing different professions that all work in education, teachers, principals and coordinators from preschools with different status and for different children, i.e. lower middle class and upper middle class. This is an active choice to get different perspectives on the question of development and learning, from the educators working with the children to the principals setting the standards for the school.

One limitation in the choice of interviewees is that they are all contacts made through an educator in Mumbai, Dr. Vijaya Murthy who is also the mentor in field for this study. Dr. Murthy has a long career in the educational field behind her and has therefore a large net of contacts. This means that even though all contacts are made through one connection the study does not necessarily get too narrow and specific despite the one connection to all interviewees. Dr. Murthy became through her help the key informant of this study.

Respondents and schools

For this study I have visited six schools, which will be named by the number 1-6 and with a 'T' or 'P' to mark weather they are traditional or progressive. All participants in the study are Indian women above the age of 30 as per my estimation and with different positions within the school, which will be explained below.
I will describe the schools in terms of traditional and progressive. These are terms that I defined after the interviews were finished and according to the teaching style in the schools observed and as mentioned by the informants. Those that I label 'traditional' are working typically school-like where reading and writing is in focus and the classroom setting is traditional as well, with children at individual desks facing a teacher by the blackboard. Teaching includes reading from stencils, answering the teachers’ questions in unison and talking or showing something in front of the class for example.

The schools that I label 'progressive' work more project-based incorporation play-way teaching and they are not focusing as much on reading and writing but more in the children's interests and will to learn. The teachers might be following a yearly plan to decide which field or topic to work with but it is not working in the same strict classroom setting. These schools resemble the Swedish preschools more than the traditional ones (see appendix 1).

Cross cultural challenges

The choice to use the help that the contact net of Dr. Murthy provided stems from the lack of familiarity with the schooling system and social structures as opposed to if the study was conducted in Sweden. It facilitated the interviews immensely since the interviewees welcomed me warmly and an instant trust was built through Dr. Murthy.

The cultural, as well as language differences had to be taken into consideration during the interviews because of the lack of knowledge of the schooling system, social structures and the local uses of English and gestures et cetera. Challenges do arise when the interview is conducted across culture, religion and generations which all in this study are (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, pp. 160, 161). The fortune to have the educator Dr. Vijaya Murthy as a support throughout the data collection facilitated the research in many ways. Dr. Murthy will here after be referred to as the key informant.

Interview questions

The questions were formed before the interviews and stayed the same through the process of interviewing. The follow-up questions varied much depending on the interview. Before the data collection I believed the draft for national curriculum was being implemented and well known by the educators, which formed the questions accordingly (see Appendix 2).

Procedure and conduct of gathering data

The study was conducted through audio recorded, individual interviews in English, which were thereafter transcribed. The choice to only have one respondent per interview facilitates the conduction of the interview, with only one person to guide through the questions (Denscombe, 2000, p. 136). One exception was made since three teachers in School 3P wished for a group interview. This form of interview encourages to interaction between the respondents as well as with the researcher. The respondents can help each other to give more full and extensive information by filling out each other’s answers (p. 136).

The interviews are semi-structured and are therefore not completely strict to only following the prepared questions. This method of interviewing requires a greater amount of flexibility
by the researcher, to let the respondent follow their train of thoughts and even leave the previously set agenda at times regarding order of questions for example. The respondent is allowed to explain and expand their arguments and responses even though it might exceed the question, as long as it is still on topic. There is a given structure, even if a loose one, which was useful when gathering data as to make sure not to lose sight of the research questions (Denscombe, 2000, p. 135). The semi-structured form of interview gives the informant a chance to speak more freely in a relaxed setting and it demands preparation by the interviewer as well as before mentioned, flexibility. The interview questions are short and open in contrast to closed, leading questions. This way of posing questions encourages and requires the personal thoughts and experiences of the informant, for example; “What do you think are...” and “In your opinion...” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, pp. 150).

Some direct observations (Denscombe, 2000, p. 165-167) were made to deepen the understanding of the educational conditions. It is a very direct way of gathering data, observing a setting while present, instead of trusting a second hand source. These observations were neither extensive (they were carried out in the classroom during one occasion per class and for 20 minutes up to two hours) nor conducted in all schools since the children were not present in some of them due to summer holidays. I did not use a specific observation sheet but had my interest in understanding the context that the answers given by my informants, existed within. Incidentally to confirm or contradict the picture painted through the answers of the interview.

**Processing and analyzing data**

During the work of transcribing the data, parts were excluded that were not considered relevant for the study. Analyzing the transcriptions made me realize that there was something missing in the responses and realized that they could not answer questions of assessment and teaching goals the way I expected. Since no national or state curriculum was legislated, it made me view the data differently and alter the research question to match the slightly shifted purpose.

When transcribing the collected data from audio recording to writing, the spoken statements have been translated as correctly as possible. Since the information gathered is of primary interest, the pauses, ways of expression in matters of tone of voice, smiles et cetera has not been transcribed, except for when it seemed completely necessary. This choice was out of relevancy and to not waste time on the already time consuming work of translating the verbal data into written form. The analysis of data has been made with focus on content and not form (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 213).

Something to consider when using audio recordings is something as basic as background noise. Due to noise some recordings were more challenging to transcribe. By translating the data into writing an interpretation of the respondents’ answers is already being made (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).
Ethical aspects of the research

To ensure that this study was being conducted correctly by ethical means, I have taken into account the four main principles stated by the Swedish research council (Vetenskapsrådet, 2015). These principles are: the principle of information, confidentiality, consent and the principle of usage. The demand for informing the respondent consists of informing about the aim of the study and on which terms they are agreeing to participate. Furthermore, they need to be informed of their participation being optional and that they are free to terminate the participation when ever they wish. All key information about the study that might affect the respondents will to participate must be included in the information.

The principle of confidentiality is in this study important when it comes to the anonymity of the respondents. To ensure confidentiality, every respondent in the study is made unidentifiable by replacing the name of the interviewee as well as the names of the schools.

To meet the principle of consent, the informants must agree to participate in the study. They must also be informed that they can interrupt their participation without any repercussions.

All information gathered can not be used in other contexts than the ones stated, for example in commercial usages or in non-scientific contexts. The principle of usage also recommend that the participants of the study should get access to the result of the research (Vetenskapsrådet, 2015).

To follow the guidelines by the Swedish research council I started off the interviews by informing the respondents that I am a student from Stockholm University writing my bachelor’s thesis in Mumbai on the topic of preschool development and the purpose of the study. Thereafter I asked whether they were willing to participate by being interviewed. I then informed them that they, as respondent, will be anonymous and everything they say will be treated confidentially. That means that neither name of the respondents nor the name the school will be named in the study with other than an unidentifiable letter or under a different name. The schools have been named by numbers “1-6” and all my informants are presented with assumed names. The respondents were informed that their participation is completely voluntary and that they could choose to stop the interview at any time. Finally, I also asked if I would be allowed to record the interview (Vetenskapsrådet, 2015).

In interview situations, there is almost always an asymmetry in power relations between the researcher and the respondent. One way of viewing the power relations is according to Kvale and Brinkmann that the person interviewing is setting the conversational frames to be able to collect the data necessary for the research, it is a one-way interrogation (2009, pp. 48-49). The dialogue is made instrumental in the sense that it is a tool to gather data and there is no importance put into the dialogue itself.

The effect the researcher has on the respondent, as a researcher is potentially stronger in India than it would be in Sweden. Since I am a teacher student from Sweden, the power relations are possibly unequal since Swedish education is respected and regarded highly developed. During the interviews this was clear at times when some of the respondents seemed to have a protective and defensive attitude at times. A will to show off a respectable surface was something I interpreted in some answers from the respondents.

In addition to above-mentioned aspects, the final touch on the information, as what to include and what not to include is ultimately mine as the author. I have the power of selection and
also the choice of how to interpret and analyze said information. I make choices when transcribing the interviews of which parts to translate and not and how I form the text. As Kvale and Brinkmann phrases it, “the monopoly of interpretation” (authors translation) (2009, p. 49).

**Quality of the study**

Since this study is conducted through interviews that were processed and transcribed, it will be affected of the authors’ interpretation of the interviewee and what was being said. Therefore, the answers concluded in this study are not guaranteed to be exactly what the respondents’ intended. The study is also qualitative, with a few respondents, possibly not giving a correctly mirrored image of the pre-schools in Mumbai and therefore the conclusions drawn are not universal (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

Throughout the work, interviewing, processing the data and writing the thesis, many thoughts have been provoked that are not within the premises of the purpose. It was not possible to use all of these, how interesting they might be since it would inflict on the validity, but some were included. Such as going into depth on the issue of children in poverty and schooling in the discussion since it is too important to overlook.

As for the reliability, the interviews are made thoroughly and with great interest. There has been consciousness of the purpose of the interviews and the questions being posed, even though a lot more than these questions were brought up during the encounter with the respondents. Only the parts necessary to answer the research questions have been included in the final product. The bias of the author, as a westerner, majoring in education with a different view on quality is obviously affecting the interpretation of the schools and the respondents.

The fact that English is not my native tongue and that the Indian English was new to me at the point of the interviews should be mentioned as another aspect that might affect the results caused by a potentially altered understanding, both from my side and the respondents. The presence of Dr. Murthy was very helpful in this aspect and facilitated the understanding, making the answers more reliable.

The informants participating in this study have different positions in the schools, i.e. teachers, principals, counselor and coordinator. This might affect the results since they all have different outlooks on education and their school depending on level of education, current position and previous experience. The level of education of the informants has not been included but would increase the level of reliability and is recommended for similar studies. The different positions of the informants do bring diversity to the results, to gain understanding from different angles, both from the educators in the classrooms and from the principals responsible for the results of the educators and with a more general view of the school. Since there was someone with a greater responsibility than solely over one classroom interviewed at each school, meaning a counselor, headmistress, coordinator or principal, the results are likely more comparable than if there were only teachers interviewed at some school. The interview with teachers for this study was conducted as an addition to the interview with a principal.
Discussion of method

The qualitative interview that I chose as my method offered a close encounter with the respondents and a good look at every school visited. In many ways it became more personal and therefore engaging and relevant. It was difficult for me to stay on topic throughout the interviews, and to get only the specific data needed, which gave me a large amount of irrelevant data. The work of transcribing these interviews was extremely time consuming and maybe I would not choose to do it again. Even though letting my respondents talk about not only my agenda, but also about what they were passionate about, made the encounter much more positive for everyone involved.

The use of one key informant to get in touch with all respondents facilitated the study immensely, but there is always the discussion of bias and the possibility that it could have tampered with the results. It would obviously have changed the results slightly with different respondents and made it harder to set the interviews, as well as the informant’s initial attitude towards the meeting that thanks to my key informant was very positive. I do not see this case as an issue for the quality of the study, since my key informant helped me to get in touch with schools in different areas of Mumbai and of different standards. Without this contact, the study could not have been carried out and it would have required much more work.

The data collected is very specific and not as general as it would be if I used a quantitative method and was able to reach a larger range of schools, by for example sending out shorter surveys. It would give more general data, from more schools but I suspect this type of method would not work as well in India, where the personal meeting and connections are of outmost importance.
Result and analysis

The focus stated by the informants would rarely touch the actual teaching, neither techniques nor contents, but lack of material aids, lack of space and a wish for an increase of spirituality or ethics etc. and the expected answers for the questions of developmental areas were more academic, or with a larger focus on fulfilling curricular goals than the answers given.

The given space for the preschool premises and material for teaching is what is lacking in many schools and therefore the acute issue to address. I also asked what the different forms of teaching in the schools do to its students, and tried to make sense of why these differences exist.

School 1T

[Traditional school for middle class and underprivileged children]

In the first school, the director I call Amrita was possibly the most difficult one to interview because of the language barrier, age difference and the power relations. During the interview I felt that Amrita needed to assert the strengths and effort the school staff was making as if I was there to judge. “Ah, you give suggestions. You give suggestions.”

At first she did not understand the questions without the help of the key informant explaining. Then, instead of answering she asked for suggestions to increase the quality of the education and first thereafter she could communicate strengths of the school. Therefore, this interview is significantly shorter than the others.

When asked about the strengths of the preschool she brought up the usage of books in senior kindergarten (K-G) and different activities, as for example fruit salad. They ask the children to bring different type of fruits to class where they talk and learn about them and then make a fruit salad all together. The third thing she mentioned as important was the celebration of Indian festivals and traditions. When asked about challenges within the school, Amrita wished for the classes to be a lot smaller, instead of the current size of 60 students per classroom. “I would like to have not more than 30 students in the classroom, we will be able to do so much better. The way we want. Now, whatever is possible”.

In my understanding of Amrita’s description, I can see a will to focus on analogue teaching when she describes their assignment with the fruit salad. They are not only asking the children to memorize and repeat facts about fruit but also using the actual fruit to understand the concept they are trying to teach. The children are able to touch, compare and taste the different fruit for a richer understanding. In a classroom with approximately 60 students, it is impossible for two teachers to interact one-on-one with every student and the teaching can most likely not be analogue throughout, even though it might be desirable. Catalogue teaching on the other hand is more manageable with such a large class and also what I observed during the visit. The students were in their desks and the teacher was addressing the whole class, encouraging them to finish their worksheet.

During the interview, Amrita gave no answers that indicated that a curriculum for the early childhood section of the school existed and she did not seem to know much of what was going
on in the classroom since the aspects she told me such as the observation of holidays and festivals and the usage of books; they are not very specific nor explanatory of the teaching. This makes me believe that the teaching going on in the classroom during my observation was truer as for representing the actual activities, than what Amrita explained to me. There were students at individual desks, having individual assignments where the teachers stood by the black board or walked around the classroom to offer help.

Because of the large classes, she stressed the importance of parents giving quality time to their children for the overall development, the daily four hours in school was according to her not sufficient. This is an issue in schools with low-income families whom are also often of low education. The low cultural and economical capital affects the schooling of the child when parents are often not able to support the development of the child, leading to low educational capital as well. The social capital of the family is inherited and with little or no help with school, the chances to increase the social capital are slim. Being in school gives the possibility to change the child’s educational capital, but as Schweinhart and Weikarts found in their study, the quality of the education is a more important denominator for development than the mere participation.

School 2T

[Traditional school for middle class children]

During the interview in School 2T as well, the importance of parents imbibing good values and giving academic support was prominent while reading the transcription, even though “(We have) those parents who are not educated much.” as principal Mala expresses it. In the next sentence she says “But they are very keen that their child should be educated well. So we get lot of, some parents we need to motivate them to do their good for the child.” Those values being important are to not be selfish, to believe in God, have manners and be polite amongst others.

The parents of whom Mala is talking are seemingly aware of the importance of a high educational capital and are trying to help their children in the best way possible. This is a pattern that I have witnessed during the interviews; my informants have many times expressed how keen parents are on educating their children to give them better opportunities than they themselves have had. Their low cultural capital can therefore be a spark to encourage their children in school, leading to a possibility to increase their educational capital.

When it comes to academic skills, Mala stresses the importance of language, written and spoken and also field trips with “real experiences” as she calls it. Providing children opportunities to develop oral competencies is an area she would like to develop. Another important aspect for the school is that the children eat healthy and varied.

Mala is the first one to talk about curriculum, and when I ask her how the preschool is run she tells me; “The syllabus is given by the department of primary section, pre-primary there is no syllabus”. There is no curriculum for the pre-primary section and the school has not designed one either.

During the observations in a classroom in school 2T I witnessed a test in a class. The students could, of free will, stand up in front of the class and recite a story they have worked with/read
during the semester. This type of memorizing and reciting are common in *catalogue teaching*, and is also an example of what Mala calls development of oral competencies.

The real experience that Mala talks about gives the impression that she, as well as Amrita in School 1P, has the intention to make the teaching more hands on, real and *analogue* to deepen the students’ understanding of different phenomena. They would go out in the city and visit people of various professional groups, markets et cetera to get experiences to bring back into the classroom. Even though the number of students is substantially smaller than the previous school, the interaction in between the teacher and each student is very sporadic and *catalogue teaching* is required in most situations.

**School 3P**

*[Progressive school for upper class children]*

The principal in school 3P, Manju, spoke very warmly of her school and the strengths being the parents, the curriculum and the teachers. She rejected teaching young children the alphabet but instead use conceptualized teaching and playful learning. “They should learn beyond the wall. In the kids, small kids, writing is not that essential. Learning, understanding is very essential.”

By focusing the curricula on play as a way of learning I interpret the teaching to be *analogue* as students are allowed to explore different phenomena freely and not always controlled by the teacher. Conceptualized teaching does give opportunities to a deeper understanding by viewing the concept through different perspectives and getting a hands-on experience.

In a *play-way curriculum* the students are allowed so many more encounters and interactions with both teachers and other students and through these interactions; learn and deepen precious knowledge. Play in learning is a way to communicate knowledge, which I understand as a way of *dialogue teaching*. When you are allowed to use and communicate your analogue understanding in new settings it becomes dialogue.

Manju speaks of the problem in her school being the infrastructure and lack of space and the things she wanted to change as to add a sandbox outside and arrange for areas for water and a soft gym. All these were already scheduled for construction since she pitched the idea to the management and they provided the money necessary.

The management of the school did not have any financial issues which makes Manju’s work easier as she says she only needs to suggest what material changes she wishes for the school and they provide the finances needed. When the school is so well equipped, financially stable and with a low child per teacher-ratio, the opportunities of raising or maintaining a high *educational capital* is highly possible. The families attending School 3P are of high *economical capital* as well as *social capital*, since they are able to pay the school fee and also for choosing a progressive school.

Assessments in the school are executed in different ways and by different actors: management, teachers and parents. The principal explained that members of the management visits classrooms for observation to base assessments on, and that parents get to contribute with opinions on the strengths and areas of improvement of the school.
To quote Manju: “here we are going to self appreciation also, we are going from superior also, we are going from parents also. So … from all angles. But we are not going for 360 because parents... Students we can not take. But they are very young”. So as for assessment only adults’ views are taken in consideration, which displays the child view practiced at the school. Children are, even though viewed as competent enough to form their education through play-way and conceptual teaching, not considered competent enough to have thoughts and ideas to improve their education.

School 3P is one of the few schools where the informant highlighted assessment as a way of improving the education. When asked about changes or improvements needed for the school, Manju would focus on infrastructural issues solely, issues that were already solved, as stated above. She did not mention any changes being made in the curriculum or the actual teaching.

Manju talks about the fact that many schools conduct basic interviews with children before admitting them to the preschool, which was unthinkable for her to do. “Because it is the parent who is to be educated. Child is already learning. (…) Let a child be a child.” The school is thereby not assessing the child before entering the classroom as many schools do. This view is monitored in all the progressive schools.

I tried to get access to the school curriculum several times, both at the visit and afterwards via email and after responding that she would get back to me. I unfortunately never received the curriculum.

**School 4T**

*Traditional school for upper class children*

The counselor, whom I have called Sakshi, of School 4T talks strongly about the schools' belief that early communication in English will benefit the children, many come from homes with another mother tongue. They start out by using both Hindi and English to alternate for ultimate understanding and then slowly start using less Hindi and more English. They also emphasize the importance of learning the alphabet and letters already in nursery: “When they go into junior K-G, we also emphasize the sound. We start all over again with the letter A, carry on with the vocabulary so that we’re. Go over what ever we have done in the nursery and carry it forward so we add more words to that vocabulary. And we also, eum, start to introduce the sounds of the letters.” (Sakshi).

It is obvious that School 4T is focusing on making the children school ready by focusing mainly on reading and thereafter writing. The education is clearly divided into what children are supposed to learn and achieve in each standard and the classroom teaching is evidently mostly *catalogue*.

She airs an important aspect that the children need to be school ready, or they will not benefit from the teaching when reaching first class. “Because in class one, the class one teacher is not going to have the patience to teach the child how to write. Because that is not expected of the class one teacher. So it is my job to see that they are able write when they go in to class one.” So if children have not been taught how to write in preschool, they will fall behind their classmates without anyone there to help and support them individually. An aspect to this problem is clearly the number of children in each class, and the teacher-student ratio. 4T is
still a school of fairly high standard catering to upper class children, and compared to other schools visited, 40 children per two teachers must be considered a good ratio.

The developmental areas Sakshi thought needed focusing to improve the pre-primary section had nothing to do with the teaching or what material could be needed, but the teachers’ skills to notice and be able to help children with specific needs or difficulties. “So picking out those children, or identifying those children so that we can work extra with them … Later on they don't get that kind of time.”

Another value and cultural aspect of teaching is expressed by Sakshi;

> Often you know with us in India, we find that if a child expresses himself very freely or says ‘teacher I don't like what you are saying to me’ It would be taken as talking back to the teacher. That is a problem. That is something we have been brought up with, you don't talk back to elders, keep quiet and listen to whatever it is that they have to say, whether they are right or wrong.

Her statement explains the ways of the traditional schools, where the views and opinions of the students are rarely valued or taken seriously. Her wish was to incorporate more of the ideas and interests of the child, which she took more seriously than maybe any other of the interviewees at traditional schools, but that in the Indian culture it is extremely difficult. The cultural aspects of the teaching could be interpreted as part of the hidden curriculum, what everyone seems to be aware of but that will never be put in writing. The hidden curriculum, Linde says, is maybe the hardest to change since it is never stated or documented in any official curricula, which also Sakshi agrees with when saying that this typical child view is a problem for developing teaching (2012, p. 19).

Mindset of the teachers is the thing she thought needed to change for reaching the developmental goals she set for the pre-primary. Assessments are being made yearly through open discussions with the whole teaching staff and through comments from parents.

Sakshi is standing out as the only informant not to talk about material changes or improvements, but about the teaching staff and there-by about the teaching itself. Most other respondents never seemed to question the way students learn or if the teaching might need adjustments for optimal learning. My interpretation is that since the school is well off economically, the desired changes of teaching material and such have already been made, and therefore there is time and energy to improve the non-material aspects of the school. I will get back to the impact the families economical and cultural capital might have on the school.

Sakshi is very open with the type of learning that students are expected to engage in, a learning based on teaching as a transferring of facts. A catalogue learning, which she expresses is a product of cultural values in India. Where younger people are supposed to accept the words of elders without questioning. This will probably not encourage learning to create a deeper understanding, such as analogue or dialogue knowledge. Students are expected to listen, learn and to be able to repeat what they have learnt.

> You don't talk back to elders, keep quiet and listen to whatever it is that they have to say, weather they are right or wrong. But today things need to change, 'cause that is not entirely correct. Because I could be wrong and the child I'm talking to might know a lot more than what I do. (Sakshi)
Sakshi is expressing a vision different to the other educators in traditional schools; her statements can easily be compared with respondents of progressive schools and this might be a result of the status of the school. With students from families of rich cultural and economic capital, requirements are often higher for educators in school. Being progressive is regarded to be of high symbolic capital, in contrast to traditional and old-school views. It is modern and therefore desirable for the families of high educational capital who are in a position of knowledge when it comes to education. They are also given the opportunity of choice in contrast to families of low educational capital where the pickings are slim due to lack of knowledge as well as economy. In addition, there is another aspect; the possibility to make the teaching more individual and child-centered with fewer students per class, which is a condition to enable progressive, analogue and dialogue teaching.

When asked about how they conduct assessments she responds: “... it is not a very structured assessment. We do sit down at the end of the year and we review what we have done through the year. And if we feel that certain areas didn't work out, why didn't they?” Except the self-assessment, parents are invited to give feedback when visiting the project display, comparable to an exhibition on what the children have been doing that year. The parental feedback is in written form and Sakshi says that the teachers take it into consideration when planning the next year.

School 5P
[Progressive school for upper class children]

The principal, whom I call Preeti, mentions the teachers' ability to make the children feel safe and welcome, how they connect with the students, as the first important strength of her school. She has strong opinions on what children should be taught when it comes to values, that spirituality is as important as academic knowledge. In the same school I also had the chance to interview the coordinator for the pre-primary department whom I will call Kala.

Preeti highlights that: “Curriculum benchmarks are pretty high” and that they always try to challenge the students. When talking about teaching and how to determine what to teach: “when they [the students] stop telling you what they know, you can start.” This statement shows a tremendous difference in the way the child is viewed, when there is a respect for the knowledge of the child and the school’s role is to build upon and challenge that knowledge. The students are not considered blank pages that a knowing, older, teacher needs to fill. Throughout the two interviews in School 5P this child centric view is often and proudly mentioned as the most important aspect.

To show another example, Preeti states: “You know, so often we underestimate what children know, and today children know a lot.” and Kala: “...I would say is that we are very child centric. ...each teacher is able to cater to individual needs of children. We are not running behind, getting some agenda done.” She also mentions that they are focusing on play-way learning, which I interpret as a clear renunciation of a traditional school system. “There is no formal writing on the board, copying or things like that.” These quotes portray the progressive views of the school, viewing children as competent and also basing the teaching upon what they know and are interested in. They work with conceptualized teaching; “Give child choices that will allow the child to develop skills that we are focusing on.”
Kala speaks about how the teachers are organizing parts of the teaching in projects, the theme set by the school but with room for the children to be independent and creative. For example, they make a cookbook together as a class and they also create mock companies where the children get to be active in the whole process. She speaks about the tomato companies they've created. “And they learn all about sales and marketing and they have team sales and marketing and labeling and manufacturing and bottling and advertising. So they come up with their own ads and they put it up everywhere.” They would bring tomatoes from home, process them in school, depending on which product they are making, then launching it before bringing the product home.

We also speak about the form of teaching in the classroom, which Kala explains is child centered and where the teachers do have a monthly plan with goals to be reached, but that the daily planning is changing depending on what the children want to do. The difficulty to let the students lead the education she says is the fear of the teacher, since it is a different approach than in traditional teaching. “Once they experience it, then they are all out there and ready to, you know, let children do anything.” Kala is airing one of the aspects that might be the most difficult about progressive and theme based teaching, being able to let the children lead and to not control all parts of the teaching, which is the traditional way a school is structured and also how the Indian culture is formed, by adults telling and teaching the children and not the other way around.

The way of teaching both Kala and Preeti describes is anything but *catalogue*. They let the children use their newfound knowledge to start their own mock-companies and bring home self made products, to continue the learning process at home when sharing their experiences with their families. In my experience, many children get encouraged to tell and describe experiences more in depth when there is a physical object to focus on and act as a reminder. They are given opportunities to have a dialogue about what they learn, both in the unstructured classroom setting with co-students and teachers as well as in their homes leading to *dialogue learning*.

When asked about assessments, Kala explains that she conducts in-class observation and they have monthly meetings with teachers to plan the upcoming month and do a check of the previous months teaching. The parents are invited to be part of the assessment at the school’s open house events where they are invited to experience a day in the preschool and afterwards fill out a feedback form. Opinions are also welcome when teachers and parents meet at pick-up each day. Except for these more unstructured forms of assessments Kala confesses; “Yeah, actually you have no assessment systems, there is nobody who is coming to inspect and tell you what quality you should have.”

This school caters to families of middle class or higher, where a high *educational capital* is more common and low *educational capital* the exception. Parents demand quality education for their children and it shows in the teaching and the school throughout. These families are not unfamiliar with using their *cultural* and *economical capital* to get the best opportunities for their children. In choosing such a progressive school, they know that their children will be challenged and educated to, what I interpret to be, the required standard.
School 6T

[Traditional school for underprivileged children]

When headmistress Avinashika is being interviewed, she is mostly concerned about the amount of children in each class, which is at present 65 with one teacher. The management of the school focuses on the economical aspect and asks her to cram more and more student into each classroom. “But when I see the management then they say; 'No, no, 65, no. It should be 70. 'We are running an institution (inaudible).' There were times when we were running with 80, before I joined... “

The headmistress also speaks of another dimension to the issue, that if children are not admitted to the school, they are likely not to attend any school because of the lack of economical capital of the family. Avinashika therefore wishes to admit as many children as possible, but the lack of space and resources is making it impossible without lowering the already poor quality. “See if, at least one standard, one division can be increased, okay. We are doing a good job by admitting the students who are not going for school if we don't ... They are not going for schooling also. We are admitting more. But this is not the right way to help them, because just we are putting them like animals, 65 in a class.” According to Avinashika there should not be more than 40 students per class to be able to meet the needs of the students. With the current student-teacher ratio, anything but catalogue teaching is most likely impossible. Teaching 65 students as a single, or even two teachers gives no room for discussions and interactions with every student individually. A project- or play-based teaching style, working around a concept, which gives bigger opportunities for more analogue, or dialogue teaching, are hardly manageable. The classrooms are not organized for such interactions, with all benches facing the direction of the teacher who is standing in front of the class only allowing interaction with the teacher and individual work. The teachers do move around in the classroom when the children are working individually, which may give opportunities for some individual guiding and help.

Most children of her school come from families where the parents have not attended school, making the children first generation learners and because of that, parents are more than willing to help in any way possible to give the best opportunities for their children. They are aware of the power education brings and they wish a better life for their children. Engaging in school, learning English and how to read and write opens many doors as to working opportunities as well as an introduction to the academic world. With the educational capital raised, the child has better chances of increasing the personal symbolic capital as well as the symbolic and economical capital of the family.

Because of this, the headmistress speaks about her frustration of not being able to arrange quality education for all children that needs it. “The quality go down, yes. So at least one more standard, having two teachers in a class with 40 students or having two separate divisions, that will make a difference.” Her view on quality education, as I interpret it, involves physical activities and play combined with desk-bound learning. I understand her view on teaching as traditional, mirroring how the teaching is organized.

The headmistress explains how there were no activities or free play, due to the lack of teachers, before she initiated it and demanded there were to be play-zones. Avinashika has understood what many scientists and educators have also found, that play is crucial in
education for young children. Despite all the benefits that come with play, it has been pushed further aside in many educational settings to give room to pure academically elements like reading and math. Play is basically viewed as unnecessary and time spent on play as being inefficient (Christie, J. & Roskos, K. 2006, pp. 57-59).

The challenges in school 6T are mostly of economical nature according to the headmistress. They need larger spaces to conduct classes and they lack educational material and books, workshops for teachers as well as an expanded group of trained teachers. She talks about how the older students help to move benches before and after classes to make room for the pre-primary students whom they share classrooms with.

Avinashika could not describe any type of assessments being made at the school. This seems to be a pattern within the traditional schools of low status and low funding. The families of low income, and with a low educational capital, will not demand increase in quality the same way many families do in the other schools. With education and knowledge comes the possibility to make demands and claims. I could tell, through her answers, that the headmistress was passionate about her work and trying to make the school better for the children, but also that the management did not seem to care about teaching per se, but only take care of the economics. So if the management are not requiring assessments, the parents do not and the teachers are working with an enormous number of students, trying to manage the workload – assessing the teaching will understandably not be a top priority.

When asked about the strengths of the pre-primary education Avinashika says without hesitation that she considers the children their source of inspiration and energy.
Discussion

In this chapter, I will discuss the results in relation to the three research questions. The first two questions will first be addressed and then I turn to the third question:

− What are educators in preschools of Mumbai prioritizing within their program when there is no legislated national curriculum for pre-primary education and how does that affect the quality of the teaching?
− Are there differences in the quality of the teaching depending on the socio-economic conditions?
− Do educators assess their program and in which way?

Priorities and quality aspects linked to socio-economic conditions

The importance of play

The Ministry of Women and Child Development is, in their draft for an early childhood curriculum, stating that child development needs to be holistic. (2012, p. 9) In the same document, the ministry forms a couple of guidelines to teachers about age appropriate activities and the goal of the ECCE program. The holistic approach aims to support not only the academic development, cognitive and psychosocial development of the child, but also aspects of health, protection, nutrition and wellbeing since these are all depending of each other. Not only targeting the child but also their families and the community, to support every child’s development. Prochner (2006, p. 311) and Chopra (2012, p. 162) both write about the importance of play, partly as it brings positive outcomes on academic achievements and also over all development in the long run. Holistic development should therefore naturally include play.

The respondents in all progressive schools mention using play and a playful learning to some extent, but the importance of play is also expressed by headmistress Avinashika in School 6T. In her case it is more about frustration since there is neither room nor finances to enable play in her school. Her statement makes it clear that play is a luxury not affordable in her school due to the lack of resources, but also to the lack of importance given to play. The management of her school did not think it was important enough to spend money on. Michnick Golinkoff, Hirsh-Pasek and Singer (2006, p. 7) have made a study, comparing children that are allowed to play in school and those who are only required to perform cognitive tasks and their conclusion is obvious. “Children need play alongside more traditional learning to build social and cognitive skills”. In the traditional school with the most progressive views, 4T, Sakshi does not mention play or playful learning but the children do have non-theoretical classes on their schedule, such as music.
What is visible throughout the study is that the higher social capital, the more likely it is for the family to choose a progressive school, both because there are few progressive schools with low fees as well as the aspect of school readiness. Families of low cultural and economical capital tend to focus on literacy and numeracy with little focus on play which is regarded a luxury and not important for school-readiness. If the cultural and educational capital within a family is low, then the knowledge about research on education is probably also low. But then one cannot overlook the matter of choice, being able to choose the school best fitting for your child. There is barely any, or no choices at all for poor families.

There is no denying that there is a pressure being put on making children of lower income families ready for school to succeed in the academic areas instead of focusing on problem solving, exploring and learning by interest which is more prominent in the richer and more progressive schools. This is the same as Prochner (2006, p. 311) describes, that parents put pressure on the preschool to make the curriculum more focused on scholastics than play. This could derive from the need to get ahead and make a good life for the children and their families and from having a longer way to strive for achievements. A low cultural capital makes gaining educational capital more of a challenge. To exemplify; the language spoken by teachers is similar to the language of students who are rich in cultural capital. Assimilating the accustomed is easier than the unfamiliar, which will facilitate and give these students a head start in school.

Play could therefore be considered a luxury not affordable. It is also stated that children from lower income and with a lower degree in education are further behind in development and have a harder time to be successful in academic settings.

**Schools for children of low capital**

Headmistress Avinashika in School 6T posed the question; “How are my students supposed to learn anything when they are hungry?” and her concern is legitimate. The case is similar for schools with substandard supplies and lack of space, how are they supposed to teach without the proper material, just as it is impossible to learn when you body is not getting enough energy and nurture. This can also sum up the prime difference between the schools catering to low-income and high-income families, the need for essential survival or not. Which discussions and curricular standards can the school afford to have, if there is not enough room for all students, if the student-teacher ratio is extremely high and the students are not even well fed? How can they afford to discuss questions of child perspective, curriculum, assessment and styles of teaching? For these schools and families, the basics, the lowest point of survival, continuing on to primary school, is what is prioritized. To even attend a preschool and have the opportunity to continue to primary school is a luxury in many families and the requirements on the school will therefore be very low. Even the headmistress in School 6T is expressing how much the parents value their child’s chance to education by talking about how parents coming into the classroom and literally standing on their knees begging the teacher to let their child gain admission to the school. Not that these families could choose to send their children to a school of higher quality even if they wanted to, people with low economical capital simply do not have the freedom of choice the same way people with a better living standard and of stronger capital.

“Studies in urban deprived setting have highlighted the fact that children in these settings lag behind their normal counterparts in age appropriate skill development, which has a direct
bearing on their future scholastic performance“ (Nair & Rekha Radhakrishnan 2004, p. 228). This fact is, according to this study, due to the lack of resources of the schools and also because of the low symbolic capital, foremost educational capital of the families. The lack thereof reduces the support a student can receive, both regarding an early home literacy experiences to lay the foundation as well as for guidance through studying. The early literacy experience has shown to be of greater importance than what was prior known as shown in the study of Sénéchal and LeFevre (2002). These literacy experiences can contain of seemingly simple acts like reading and just talking with your child. What they found was that children with a family of a stronger cultural and, primarily, educational capital had learned and could make use of a larger amount of words than children from less fortunate backgrounds, and the discrepancy continued to grow as the children grew (2002, pp. 445-460).

Children of weak symbolic capital and economical capital, with no family background in academics or in school even, are already when entering the preschool falling behind because of the lack of early literacy experience. With this baggage, attending one of the traditional schools, within this study, for families of low income will most likely give these children the advantage needed. As Rehka Radhakrishnan states, that children inherit poverty and continue a “vicious cycle of poverty” if they do not have the ability to educate themselves and get an employment (2004). No one can foresee how the life of the children attending these schools will be, but the competition is rough and many more fortunate children get a better start in life, an advantage. This is why quality education is so important, especially for children born in poor families.

The progressive schools

Turning the focus to the progressive schools, a common denominator is their child perspective, which is very allowing and making their practice child-centered and not only focusing literacy skills. Focus shifts to a more project based and analogue teaching with play as a prominent part. All progressive schools also cater to families with a higher economical and educational capital, with the knowledge and choice to demand quality in their child's education. With this knowledge of the progressive schools acquired through the study, it is clear that their teaching is of high quality. The low teacher-student ratio alone can raise the quality by offering the possibility to more interactions with every child, and to base the teaching on interests of the children in a playful way. My respondents also stress the importance of play and arrange the space and the time for it, clearly an important factor that is considered a luxury in other settings.

The parents’ and teachers’ roles

In all schools, parents are being mentioned either as an asset or as a hindrance that needs to be corrected which illustrates the value of family and community in India. Educators are focusing on helping the parents as well. “…those parents who are not educated much. But they are very keen that their child should be educated well. So we get lot of, some parents we need to motivate them to do their good for the child.” This quote of the principal in School 2T indicate a duality in the attitude of the parents. Some are doing everything to have their child educated since they themselves are not, and some do not seem to value or prioritize school of the very same reason. Parents need to be corrected and they themselves also educated in the view of several educators interviewed.
Another value and cultural aspect of teaching is expressed by the counselor in School 4P: “Often you know with us in India, we find that if a child expresses himself very freely or says 'teacher I don't like what you are saying to me', it would be taken as talking back to the teacher. That is a problem. That is something we have been brought up with, you don't talk back to elders, keep quiet and listen to whatever it is that they have to say, weather they are right or wrong.” Her statement explains the ways of the traditional schools, dominated by catalogue teaching, where the views and opinions of the students are rarely valued or taken seriously. Her wish was to incorporate more of the ideas and interests of the child, which she took more seriously than maybe any other of the interviewees at traditional schools, but that in the Indian culture it is extremely difficult. The mindset of the teachers is the thing she thought needed to change for reaching the developmental goals she set for the pre-primary section.

**Religion and spirituality**

Something that would reoccur in almost all schools as a prominent pattern is that spirituality and religion get to take great place in the preschool syllabus, in both the schools for more privileged families and for the underprivileged families. It is visible in the classroom in the form of saying grace before eating snack and daily scheduled meditation. The director of School 5P defends her point of view in following matter:

As a school we want to focus more on spirituality so we make children do meditation. Everybody does ten minutes of meditation. But, we wanna do more of that, because I know that children learn at this age, and all these growing years, unquestioning. They just learn it. And it's the most wonderful way of leaving it there. And I think, today, the world needs only that. I'm making a very bold statement, but I think the world needs only that. … so we wanna go all out to only work on spiritual intelligence of children, because we feel once that is in place, emotional intelligence, academic intelligence, everything is a bi-product, it will fall in place. See today people have tremendous knowledge, no wisdom.

She is expressing how important this young age is and how easily children can accept spirituality, which she claims is of outmost importance to develop other skills and intelligences, as she puts it.

The principal of School 2T speaks about religion as a basic foundation in education with these words: “Above all things, believe in God. Children should be thought that there is one force. That is why we have prayers in the school. Why we pray and we tell them the meaning.”

The only exception is School 3P where neither the teachers nor the principal mentions religion during the interview and there were no visible signs of them practicing any religion or spirituality in the classrooms. This school was also standing out the most from the other schools since the principal were so familiar with all the students, stressing the importance of not grading children too early and not focusing on reading and writing at first but engaging and finding students interests with a project based syllabus.
- Do educators assess their program and in which way?

In all schools, assessments were rarely being made regularly and never by an impartial inspector. The assessments, if made, consist of observations by a principal or coordinator and of comments made by parents. These comments and opinions are gathered either on a yearly basis or spontaneously in the daily meeting. When children are about to start attending preschool, an interview is in most cases set up to assess the child's academic skills as well as the parents’ attitudes and ability to support the child in its academic carrier. Focus on assessments seems to be merely on the children, and not on the practice per se. This reflects on the answers from the respondents when being asked about strengths and developmental areas within the preschool program, when rarely anything about pedagogical issues, syllabus or lesson plans was mentioned. “Yeah, actually you have no assessment systems, there is nobody who is coming to inspect and tell you what quality you should have.” Kala in School 5P. The same is expressed by Sakshi in School 4T: “...it is not a very structured assessment.”

One school that stood out in this aspect was School 4T where the pre-primary counselor wished for a more extensive work in detecting and helping students in need of special education.

The previous quotes explain the wide differences in quality throughout the schools visited. There is no regulatory body controlling neither the quality of the schools nor the level of understanding and development amongst the students. A pattern shown is that there is a higher degree of assessment in School 3P, 4T and 5P, the three schools where students come from families of strong economical capital, even though it is neither being made regularly nor strict.

When it comes to who is allowed to assess the education, the schools varied slightly but came together on two things. According to what they told me, no schools used external reviews and assessments were never made by the students themselves. The parents could leave comments and ideas for improvement as well as teachers and principals sat down to evaluate and make new curricular plans accordingly. Manju in School 3P explained why the children were not asked to assess their time in school; “But they are very young”. This mirrors the child perspective of the educators and perhaps even of India in general. Even though children are considered creative, knowledgeable and independent, they are not asked how they perceive their education and they are supposed to do as they are told, not set the agenda themselves. “…you don't talk back to elders, keep quiet and listen to whatever it is that they have to say, weather they are right or wrong” (Sakshi School 4T).

Relevance for the profession

This study can give an insight into what quality in a global perspective can be and facilitate the understanding of how varied educators’ value education can be and how they vary in their view on learning. This can be relevant not only to broaden the perspective of quality but also to value the play-way teaching in Swedish preschools.

In the Indian context, this study can hopefully shed some light on the importance of play to increase quality in preschool education and become an addition to the already existing research.
Conclusions

When trying to map the quality of a preschool there is of essence to outline what is being valued in the particular setting, in Mumbai, India. What I found was that core values are important within the educational system such as religion, family, courtesy and manners alongside with school readiness such as learning how to read and write. It seems as if the educational capital is important to families from all social and economical backgrounds, but in different ways. The families with larger economical capital can choose from a range of schools to pick the one they believe will give their children the best opportunities to further studies and future employment. They tend to pick progressive schools focusing on play and child-initiated learning or stricter, more traditional upper-class schools with high demands. Families with low, or very low economical capital are fighting to make sure their child attends any school, so that their child by gaining educational capital can transfer this to economical capital.

The two schools where I was told assessment was made and used to improve the education are both progressive schools, catering to children from middle-, or upper-class families. Parental involvement was to all appearance important in all of the schools, and according to the interviewees, the parents themselves desired to be involved and active in their child's schooling. Families who derive from poorer areas and with a low educational capital are eager for their child to progress and succeed in the academic world where they themselves were never allowed. But getting ahead and succeeding seems to be important for children of all families.

It appears that many parents feel that their children should get a head start in the rat race of academic success and expect pre-primary class to make their children adept in reading, writing and arithmetic. (Devarakonda, 2013, p. 120)

So from the parents' perspective, education seems to be valued in similar ways, but there might be different demands and claims depending on the educational capital of the families.

The lack of a legislated curriculum, on national or state level, is to me obviously a problem, not only because the educators interviewed did neither emphasize curricular issues nor any regular or structured assessments, but mostly because of the huge differences in quality. The schools where children from low-income families, with a weak symbolic capital attends, are also the ones with the highest student-teacher ratio, the most traditional and school like teaching as well as lack of spaces and opportunities for play. These children that get less help at home and are already at a disadvantage are placed in schools where there are small opportunities to individualize the teaching and give additional support. Whereas children from high-income families with a higher symbolic capital, both educational and cultural, get to choose the school with the best opportunities possible, where every child can thrive in a progressive, child-centric and theme based teaching. Rarely before have I seen a school system this polarized, and I believe it is partly because of the lack of both a national and a state curriculum.

One of the few times I heard the teachers expressing difficulties in the actual teaching and not about anything material, the teachers in School 3P spoke about the language barrier. The amount of languages spoken within the country, and even in each state, could be an
obstruction in implementing a national curriculum, or even a mandatory curriculum on state level. The diversity in languages also portrays the country itself, with regions, people and cultures rich in diversity. Diversity and polarization, from the outmost poor to the filthy rich, all living on the same street but in different worlds. These worlds rarely meet and definitely not in the premises of the pre-schools I have visited. The lack of a legislated curriculum is part of the problem, keeping preschools segregated.

The results and conclusions I have reached are not new when comparing with the research I had found before. The importance of play, and how it is viewed in different settings was made clear when visiting the schools. To sum it up; play comes secondary in poor schools but is given room and importance in rich schools. This study creates an addition to the existing works and offers a close-up on a context unknown to many. It might help create and deepen the understanding in the western world about how to define quality in preschools in India.

Nirmala Rao (2010) brought up the notion on how to value quality, and it is true that the quality that I witnessed in many of the schools would be substandard in Sweden, but that is not the case in Mumbai and India.

**Further research**

After completing this study, my interests in education in India and what elements that affects children’s future schooling, have been evoked and I would find it interesting to compare the differences in child development depending on what pre-primary program they have been attending. Especially, to compare children of high symbolic and economic capital in traditional programs with children of low capital in progressive program, to outline how much of the development can be traced back to education and what derives from the family background.
References


Landguiden, Available at: (http://www.landguiden.se/Lander/Asien/Indien?p=1) 2015-01-04.


Appendices

Appendix 1

List of schools and respondents participating in the study

School 1T is a traditional school for middle class and underprivileged children and families. The number of children in each class is approximately 50-60 with one teacher and one assistant/help teacher. The help teacher is not necessarily educated.

Respondent: The director.

School 2T, traditional, also caters the middle class. Children per class are 40 with one teacher and one co-teacher.

Respondent: The principal.

School 3P is a private school, catering upper class families, founded by a trust and more progressive than the two above. The school is in transition since the principal just started and a lot of children followed the previous principal to another school. Number of children during the visit was 5 – 10 in each class with one teacher. Normally the number is 25 – 30 according to the principal.

Respondents: Principal and three teachers.

School 4T is an upper class school with approximately 40 children per class and two teachers. The pedagogy and teaching style is very traditional.

Respondent: The counselor for the pre-primary section.

School 5P is also an upper class school but with a more progressive pedagogy compared to School 4. The number of children in each class is about 30.

Respondents: The director and coordinator for pre-primary.

School 6T is traditional and for the underprivileged children, there are 65 children per class with one teacher.

Respondent: The headmistress for the pre-primary section
Appendix 2

Interview questions.

Would you like to tell me about the strengths that you see in the preschool program in your school?

What do you think are the main developmental areas within the preschool? Is there anything you would like to do differently?

In your opinion, what needs to be done to reach these goals? What resources are needed?

What challenges do you see in reaching those goals?

In what way is the quality assessed within the program?