“If I had a reason for it...”

An intersectional study of preschool teacher’s intercultural education with children books.
Abstract

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The aim of this qualitative study was to examine how preschool teachers in contemporary Sweden think and talk about intercultural education in the current context in which Sweden is rapidly becoming a more culturally diverse country. Specifically, the study applied an intersectional framework to examine how teacher’s work and talk around cultural issues and how children’s books can contribute to the broader pedagogical project of developing intercultural education in preschool. The research questions guiding this research were: How do teachers in ethnically diverse preschools work with and talk about children’s books in their daily interactions with children? How do teachers in ethnically homogenous preschools work with and talk about children’s books in their daily interactions with children? Teachers from two preschools - differing in terms of the ethnic make-up of their child population - were asked to read a pair of children’s books whose storylines had obvious links to issues related to cultural diversity. The teachers were then asked to discuss the books in focus groups. Transcripts of the focus groups were then subjected to a thematic analysis from an intersectional perspective. These analyses revealed that teachers in both preschools considered children’s age and their relative intellectual and emotional competencies to be significant barriers for using culturally sensitive children’s book to promote an intercultural education in preschool. Furthermore, the teachers oriented to other social categories, such as gender and family, in their analyses of the children’s books. These findings raise questions about if and how preschool teachers choose to engage with cultural issues in their preschools.

*Keywords*: intersectionality, intercultural education, children’s books, preschool education, normcritical perspective.
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1. Introduction

In 2015, 162 877 people sought asylum in Sweden, that is 81 576 more people than 2014. Of these people, 70 384 are children (Migrationsverket, 2016). In order to address this rapid diversification of Swedish society, particularly in the education sector that serves the youth, work needs to be done. In particular, there is a pressing need for research into the development and implementation of intercultural education in Swedish preschools. Awareness of the need for a more culturally sensitive education is reflected in the Swedish preschool curriculum. For example, the official English translation of the curriculum notes that: “Increasing mobility across national borders creates cultural diversity in the preschool, which provides children with the opportunity to show respect and consideration for each individual irrespective of background.” (Skolverket, 2010, p. 4). Furthermore, the curriculum specifies that the preschools in Sweden should encourage and strengthen children’s compassion and empathy for the situations of others, and develop an understanding that all persons have equal value and that no child in the preschool should be subjected to discrimination due to e.g. ethnicity, religion or gender. The preschool must strive to ensure that each child develop their identity and feel secure in themselves (ibid).

Intercultural education is one approach to organizing preschool education in ways that address issues of cultural diversity in the practise. Intercultural education not only concerns learning about other cultures, it also focuses on collaborative learning across cultures without valuing one cultural perspective over another (Lahdenperä, 2004). One key concept to complement an intercultural education is the idea of intersectionality. Intersectionality is defined as an awareness that people’s identities are made up of multiple, co-existing (“intersecting”) social categories such as race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status and (dis)ability (Bhopal & Preston, 2012; Lykke, 2003). The categories do not exist independently and cannot be separated, they interact and affect one another.

There are many ways in which issues related to cultural diversity can be engaged with in preschool education. One of the most common is through the use of children's books.
Children’s books are one key way in which children are exposed to the kinds of social categories that make up their identities (Edwards, 2008).

In the present study we focus specifically on the question of how preschool teachers work with children’s books as pedagogical tools for developing an intercultural education. In particular, we are interested in how the application of an intersectional framework to examine how teacher’s work and talk around cultural issues and children’s books can contribute to the broader pedagogical project of developing intercultural education in preschools. Our focus on children’s books is based not only on the fact that they are a common “tool” used in everyday preschool activities. Our focus is also motivated by our method: we consider children’s books to be concrete and familiar objects useful for motivating teachers’ discussions about issues related to intercultural education in preschools.

We will begin this paper by discussing the core concepts in our study: intercultural education, normcriticism and intersectionality. Following by relevant literature and previous research. Next we will describe our study method, followed by a presentation of our findings. We conclude with a discussion of our findings and their implications for preschool pedagogy and education research.
2. Background

In the following section we will begin by explaining the key concepts used in this study: intercultural education, intersectionality and normcriticism. Following this discussion, we will review literature in areas relevant to the current study: Teacher’s apprehension for discussing cultural issues in preschool, children’s identity development, and the role of children’s books in children’s identity development and intercultural education.

2.1 Intercultural Education, Intersectionality and Normcriticism

In this section we provide definitions of intercultural education, normcriticism and intersectionality as they are implemented in this study. First we start with intercultural education, followed by norms and normcriticism since intersectionality are a product of those two concept.

The preschool is the institution that many children in Sweden, regardless of cultural background first make formal contact with in the Swedish society. It is a site of cultural integration. Bozarslan (2001) describes integration\(^1\) as a relational process of give and take between at least two parties. In preschool this relational process can emerge between staff, children and parents and it requires that both parties want to be involved and that those involved will be “accepted” for who they are.

Lahdenperä (2004) argues that, at the same time, the Swedish preschool is a site were Swedish values and norms are represented. This is reflected by the fact that preschools in Sweden are governed by a national curriculum that spells out these norms and values. Deviation from these norms and values, argues Lahdenperä (2004), can result in discrimination of the “deviant” people and practices. Therefore, intercultural education is needed to highlight these discriminating norms and find new ways of working and thinking about education in order to prevent discrimination (ibid). Lahdenperä (2004) defines intercultural education as a concept where intercultural learning, communication and

\(^{1}\) The Swedish meaning for integration are different from the English definition. However, we are using the Swedish definition as Bozarslan describes.
teaching interacts. To work from an intercultural perspective means to organize the classrooms or preschools so that the education addresses issues regarding cultural diversity; no perspective, person or culture should be more superior than another; and at the same time, all aspects of other cultures, including language, are valued and understood as interconnected (ibid).

When trying to incorporate multiple cultures in education, as in an intercultural educational approach, one must be careful not to essentialize students based on their ethnicity. Gruber (2008) gives an example of a teacher’s group assignment with the purpose of helping students see national differences between Sweden and other countries. The teacher divided the students into groups connected to an “home country”, for example Tunisia. Each group had one or two members who had a connection to the “home country” and some “Swedish” students. The task was to compare the two countries (Sweden and Tunisia) and this in effect “positioned” the foreign students as representations of their country, with the student seen as “being” their country. The country becomes a part of the student’s identity regardless of what the student’s own opinion of one’s identity and “national belonging” is (Gruber, 2008).

According to Fjällhed (2012) multiculturalism refers to the perspective that people from different cultures can coexist without ever having to meet or interact with one another. Interculturalism, by contrast, refers to cultures coexisting through the active meeting and interaction among people from the different cultures in mutual respect (ibid).

A defining quality of an intercultural education is the recognition that people are not defined solely by their ethnicity. That is, people’s identities are understood from an intersectional perspective. The core principle of intersectionality is awareness that people’s identities are composed by multiple social categories e.g. race/ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status and (dis)ability. “An intersectional approach recognises that these multiple [identities] intersections exist in endless combinations, and that they can sometimes lead to privilege and sometimes to discrimination.” (Igloy, 2015, p. 32) The categories do not exist independently and cannot be separated, they will interact and affect each other.

Understanding the idea of intersectionality requires a discussion of the concept of norms. Norms are explicit and implicit rules of a particular social group that govern behaviour
deemed “appropriate” by that group. Norms influence the way in which people think and talk about, as well as perform, social categories like ethnicity, gender, and age. Consequently, norms play an important role in how people understand themselves and one another (Nordenmark & Rosén, 2008). Norms do not exist to cause people harm or pain and people are not intentionally mean and wants to hurt someone else. But people for the most part simply follow the norms without thinking and it can be difficult to see how norms affect the individual and other in the society (Dolk, 2013; Martinsson & Reimers, 2014).

Normcriticism is the term given to a perspective for critically evaluating the ways in which any social group develops and maintain norms so that the harmful and discriminating effects of the norms can be challenged. Martinsson & Reimers (2014) note that norms have to exist and that they are important for the society, but we have to make them visible and problematize them so the norms do not exclude, intensify or create hierarchy between individuals and groups.

Norms do not exist on their own and cannot be seen as something separate from other norms, they exist in relation to each other (Dolk 2013; Martinsson & Reimers, 2014). To have an intersectional view means that you notice that multiple norms affect people at the same time and that norms interacts and overlaps with each other. In different situations, different norms can play different roles for the same person, and it affects the individual's possibilities and/or limitations in a certain context (Salmson & Ivarsson, 2015). For example, it can be valued to be a girl in a cooking context but not valued as high to be a girl in a sport context. Norms create positions that makes it possible to identify with and by these positions comes expectations on e.g. how to be, act or how to live your life (Martinsson & Reimers, 2014).

The concept of intersectionality can be applied analytically to make the researcher sensitive to the various social categories and norms that make up a person’s identity like gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity and age etc. It is this approach that we adopt in our study. Intersectionality is the interaction among these norms that is emphasized in the analysis, none of them is more outstanding or noticeable or can be taken out of the equation (Lykke, 2003). Intersectionality “[…]is based on the premise that understanding identities is a journey, one that changes through different times in history and transforms through different spaces.” (Bhopal & Preston, p.1, 2012). In contrast to the intersectional view, Mattsson (2010) describes the essentialistic view, which treats ethnicities (one part of the
intersectionality concept) as something definite and absolute (recall the Tunisian classroom example from Gruber (2008)). Looked at from an intersectional perspective, identity development is about an identity created by history, people's actions and norms (Mattsson, 2010). For example, if you are a girl, age three, with parents from Syria, all of these categories will shape your identity and how you and others see you. Ethnicity is only one part of your whole identity, but it cannot be ignored neither seen alone. Therefore, the term intersectionality as analysis tool can help us understand how all of our different categories and norms, that exist in society i.e. interactions between people, can affect our whole identity (Bhopal & Preston, 2012).

2.2 Apprehension for Engaging with Cultural Issues in Preschool & Children’s Self-Development

It is important to address norms e.g. ethnicity within intersectionality, however Pollock's (2004) research regarding race issues, shows that many educators find it hard to talk about race. Reasons for this reluctance or apprehension for talking about race include lack of understanding of how this talk can benefit children, views that talking about race create grounds for racism, or that simply talking about race may seem racist in itself. However, both our talk and our silence about race can affect what we do and do not do about racial inequality. So in order to promote equality Pollock stresses that educators have to address this topic otherwise it can have a negative impact on children i.e. maintaining inequality (ibid).

Research on this topic in Sweden has found that Swedish teachers and preschool teachers in ethnically homogenous schools create an affinity and togetherness regarding the Swedish language and school’s traditions, and they avoid talking about children's cultural diversity and experiences (Lunneblad, 2013). Lunneblad (2013) explains that when children's cultural diversity is highlighted it is often in connection to their difficulties and problems. Often the education takes a compensatory attitude regarding children with connection to another culture (ibid). Lunneblad’s research is relevant to the aim of the given study’s focus on how preschool teachers work with cultural issues in the preschool and how this work can affect children's identity development.

Even though teachers may feel apprehensive to discuss topics like ethnicity in the preschool, it is important to do so early in preschool, since children's identity development
start directly from they are born. Daniel Stern’s theory of self-development provides our framework for thinking about children’s identity development. This theory focuses on the communication that happens between adults and children and Stern's theory sets its sights on the child's world and also how others relate to the individual child (Brodin & Hylander, 1997). It is the child's inner development and the child's perception of self and the outside world that is of interest (ibid). Stern argue that from the time when the child is born, there is an innate sense of self, long before the child start reflect on oneself and has developed a language. Through interaction with others we create and recreate ourselves and our identity, and that is something that never ends (Brodin & Hylander, 1997; Fennefoss & Jansen, 2009). Since this study adopt an intersectional view, Stern’s definition about how children are created in meeting with others is useful, since an intersectional view means that all norms and expectations on people affect the possibilities to develop an identity. This is also the reason why children books are appropriated in this study. Books mediate something with its pictures and actions. When reading books, it affects us and provide new and extended ways of understanding our surroundings.

2.3 Children's Books as an Influence and Impact on Identity Development

Children books are an important way in which children are exposed to a world beyond that of their immediate surroundings (Edwards 2008; Salmson & Ivarsson, 2015). Reading stimulates children's fantasy and thinking, and it can also expand their emotional and social development. As such, children’s books are an important tool for representing the various markers of identity that contribute to a child’s identity development.

Children's books often take place within the national frame and mostly describes the familiar world and do not usually portray the global world; it is the white middle class that is overrepresented in children's books (Kåreland, 2013). Edwards (2008) argues that there should be a broad representation of books so all children can feel included and recognized. When thinking about the preschool context in particular, one must also take into account the role that adults play as the ones who choose the books that are used in the preschool, especially considering the impact that the text and illustrations in books can have on children (Nettervik, 2002).
Martinsson (2014) notes a key contradiction in the production of children’s books. On the one hand, it is important for children to be able to identify physically with the characters in books, otherwise they risk feeling alienated. On the other hand, inclusion of superficial physical features in characters in children’s books risks stereotyping people who have those features. One example is *Tintin i Kongo* and *Liten skär och alla små brokiga* who both “give space” to black characters but in a way that still stereotypes and consolidates black people as “something” who doesn’t have the same value as white. Both of these example, being invisible or being stereotyped contributes to how children can construct their identity (ibid). More and more research has shown a connection between discrimination of race and ethnicity and physical and psychological illness. Sami teenagers felt exposed in society because of the ignorance and intolerance and that leads to that Sami teenagers not want to express or share their identity (Omma, 2013). This is problematic and something that the Swedish preschool has to address since it can be applied on other ethnicities. However, human characters are not the only aspect of children’s books with which children can identify. The story, ideas and other characters such as animals and other things can be important for children to identify with, it is the variation that is the important.

### 2.4 Children’s Books, Swedish Preschool, and Intercultural Education

While it may seem obvious to examine questions of intercultural preschool education and intersectionality through studies of how culturally sensitive children’s books are used in preschools, there is surprisingly few published research studies in this area. Casanova (2012), Liliekvist (2008) and Riis-Pedersen (2011) all say that there have been few researches about their research topics, e.g. regarding art pedagogy from an intercultural perspective and how the narrative aspects of children books affect childrens possibilities to recognition. This lack of research is especially evident when considering the specific context of Swedish preschool education; however, there has been extensive work in this area at the level of undergraduate research. Below we summarize some of the key finding from the undergraduate research, however Casanovas research is not an undergrated research, it is a master.

First it is important to understand historically how cultural issues have been treated in children’s books in Sweden. In a survey of Swedish children’s books published between
1947 and 2009, Liliekvist (2008) examined changes in the ways that things like the environment, class, gender, culture, and adult-child relations have been depicted. She found, for example, that contemporary children’s book, relative to the past, give a greater space for the children characters to show emotions. Furthermore, characters in contemporary children’s books are more individualized which means that stereotypes are not as common as they used to be, although stereotypes are still represented.

In Riis-Pedersen’s (2011) study she investigated five children books through their stories and characters to see if there are any identification marks for the children to identify with, regardless of ethnical background. Riis-Pedersen (2011) found that it is important for children to have identification marks to identify with so they can recognize themselves and also assimilate the book’s story and meaning. Riis-Pedersen (2011) found that character with a different ethnicity or culture than the norm is portraited as someone exotic and different in the Swedish culture and society.

The importance of exposing children to varied cultural representations in art work, like in children’s books is discussed by Casanova (2012) and Hansson Anselius (2015). Hansson Anselius examines how cultural norms and values are represented in the pictures of children’s books and how preschools go about selecting books based on these qualities. She specifically studied differences in book selection based on whether the preschool did or did not adopt a norm critical pedagogy. In her method, Hansson Anselius chose two books from a preschool affiliated with a norm critical pedagogy and two from a preschool that was not norm critical. She subjected these books to an analysis to characterize how norms and values were represented in the narratives and characters. In the books obtained from the preschools that did not practice a norm critical approach, she found representations of norms and values that reproduced old and conservative ideas of gender. In books obtained from the norm critical preschool she found that the characters were not so stereotyped. Hansson Anselius points out that it is important how the preschool teachers approach the reproductions of norms and values and to work actively with these questions will help to give the children more opportunities to create a broader identity. Similarly, Casanova (2012) highlights the importance of having an intercultural art pedagogy that shows a broad perspective of pictures to make students feel included in the Swedish society. We understand it as, if we succeed in using intercultural education, showing many
different types of art and pictures in a natural way then the students can feel represented. But it is important that both our approach and the content is respectful and not disparaging.

To summarize, our contribution with this research is to expand the understanding of how preschool teachers talk and work with intercultural education, mostly concerning children’s books seen through an intersectional perspective and how norms can create and affect childrens possibilities for identity development.
3. Aim and Research Questions

The purpose of this research is to contribute more knowledge about how preschool teacher’s in Sweden work with issues of cultural diversity in their preschools. Specifically, this study will apply an intersectional framework to examine how teacher’s work and talk around cultural issues and children’s books can contribute to the broader pedagogical project of developing intercultural education in preschool. By applying an intersectional framework, we are interested to see which norms that become visible in the teacher’s conversation regarding children and children books.

This examination is guided by the following research questions:

- How do teachers in one ethnically diversified preschool describe their experiences of working with children’s books in their daily interaction with children?
- How do teachers in one ethnically homogenous preschool describes their experiences of working with children’s books in their daily interaction with children?
4. Method

The research presented in this paper is based on a qualitative study using focus group interviews with teachers at two preschools.

4.1 Field Sites

The participating preschools were selected based on the proportion of enrolled children with immigrant backgrounds\(^2\). Specifically, we sought to have two preschool units that differed such that one unit had a relatively higher proportion of immigrant background children than the other unit. This was done in order to examine potential differences among the teachers regarding their approach to thinking about intercultural issues in the preschool. One unit was located in an urban area and had six of fourteen children with immigrant background. The second unit was based in a rural preschool, and had one of fifteen children with immigrant background. The units in both preschools served children one to three years of age.

Selection of the participating preschools was also based on the researchers’ familiarity with the schools. Both of the researchers conducted five of their seven-week teaching practicum courses at these preschools, one researcher at each preschool. As a result, each researcher had a working familiarity of the day to day operations of each preschool. The relative familiarity between the researchers and the teachers at the schools allowed for receptivity of the teachers to participate in the study.

The preschool with six of fourteen children with immigrant background will be referred to as the *urban* preschool and the preschool with one of fifteen children with immigrant background will be referred to as the *rural* preschool.

4.2 Participants

A total of six preschool teachers participated in the study. The preschools and the teachers have been given pseudonyms in order to protect their identities.

\(^2\) We defined an immigrant background as the child either being an immigrant or being a first generation Swede.
Three female preschool teachers participated from the urban preschool, Maja, Kerstin, and Lisa. Maja has worked as a preschool teacher for twelve years, only in ethnically homogenous areas before this preschool. Kerstin has been a preschool teacher for 18 years but has worked in preschools as a preschool teacher’s assistant for 35 years. Kerstin has worked in two different preschools, which she says were multicultural. Maja and Kerstin have worked together for five years. Lisa has worked as a preschool teacher for ten years, in two different places, this is the first place with many ethnicities. Maja, Kerstin, and Lisa have worked together for seven months. Maja and Kerstin has worked for five years and Lisa for two years at the current preschool.

Three female preschool teachers participated from the rural preschool: Betty, Isabell, and Karin. Betty has worked for 16 years and she has been working in four other preschools that were all ethnically homogeneous. Isabell has also worked for 16 years and says that she has been working in one multicultural preschool and one homogeneous before she came to this preschool. Karin has been working for five years and only at the current preschool. All three teachers have worked together for three months. Karin has worked at the current preschool for five years, Betty for four and a half years and Isabell for three months.

### 4.3 Focus Group Interviews

Teachers from each of the two preschools participated in one focus group interview each. The reason for using focus group interviews is that the preschool teachers work in teams and therefore it seems relevant to interview them as a team. Each focus group interview lasted one hour. Each focus group interview where conducted at the current preschool in a quiet and separated room that were choosen by the preschool teachers. This was done in order for them to feel comfortable and to make it possible to conduct the focus group interviews during their working time (Ahrne & Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2015). The focus groups were semi-structured, using a general topic guide to ensure that the study topics were addressed. Furthermore, the guide was used in order to ensure comparability between data gathered from the urban and rural preschool focus groups (Dahlin-Ivanoff, 2015). The topic prompts were formulated to give opportunities for the participants to have an open discussion.

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3 In Sweden preschool teacher assistant means *barnskötare.*
One week before the interview, copies of two children’s books were distributed to the preschool teachers. The children’s books were *Den dagen* and *Maskerad* (see section 4.4 below). Both books focus on cultural issues of ethnicity and migration. Our aim with having the teachers read and discuss these books was to elicit the teacher’s ideas and perspectives regarding developing an intercultural pedagogy in preschool.

The guiding topics for the focus group interviews were: teacher biographies, teamwork, how they, as a team, work with and think about books in preschool and also how they thought about the two books that we brought in. They were asked to think about how they would use the two books in their preschools (see appendix 2).

The researchers acted as group moderators in the interviews. Group moderators promote interaction between the participants and guide and encourage them to discussion (Dahlin-Ivanoff, 2015). Both researchers participated in the interviews and shared the moderator role. One researcher guided the interview discussion while the second researcher kept notes. At times the note-keeping researcher also stepped in to ask a supplementary question, when necessary.

### 4.4 Focus Group Children’s Books: *Den dagen* and *Maskerad*

The two selected children’s books were *Den dagen* (Sjögren, 2008) and *Maskerad* (Murray Brodin, 2009). As books that treated issues of multiculturalism and immigration, the books were chosen for their potential to elicit discussion from the teachers about their approach to intercultural education.

The story of *Den dagen* is about a bird family who lives in their home but one day, other birds attack them and they have to escape and leave their home. The family gets separated from the father and a family member dies. During the escape the family meets other “refugee” birds that are in the same situation of losing their homes. The family lives in insecurity of what is going to happen next and one day the family leaves for another country and they are relieved of not being afraid anymore.

In *Maskerad* the story takes place in ordinary situations at a preschool and the characters represent different ethnicities. The book concern things like disagreement, fights, caring and solutions between children. The books were the basis for the questions asked in the focus groups.
4.5 Documentation

The focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed. Field notes based on the focus groups were written within two hours of the interviews. This was done in order to start the process of analysing the data as soon as possible, when all the impressions from the interview were still fresh. Transcriptions of the recordings were made one day after the interviews. Each researcher transcribed one of the recordings of one of the two focus group interviews. The researchers then read and reviewed one another’s transcriptions both to ensure accuracy of the transcription and as a form of preliminary analysis to identify themes.

4.6 Analysis Method

The transcriptions were subjected to a thematic analysis, a norm critical perspective (see 2.1 above) was used to guide these analyses. In particular, our analyses focused on the ways in which the thinking and talk of the teacher’s experiences could be understood from an intersectional perspective (see 2.1 above). We looked to answer the research questions i.e. how the teacher’s describe their experiences of working with children’s books in their daily interaction with children. We also looked for occurring norms in order to meet the intersectional aim of this study.

The analysis started when we transcribed the interviews. We read and discussed the data several times during the analysis, we compared and looked for similarities and differences between the preschools, i.e. what the preschool teacher’s expressed about using children books more concrete in their practices. We find that they had similar ways in using and working with books and in the teacher’s expressions we could identify norms like competence in relation to children’s age, gender, (familiarity) and ethnicity. These were norms that we could see in both of the groups. We categorized our findings under two headlines: Intercultural education and Teachers discussions of gender and competence. Findings discussed under the theme of Intercultural education include observations about the teacher’s practices related to their efforts to work with cultural issues in the preschool, both generally and with respect to using the two books discussed in the focus group, this meet the research questions. Findings discussed under the theme of Teachers discussions of gender and competence concern the teacher’s ways of talking about social
norms/categories, this section meet the aim of this study. All the findings, under both headlines, can be understood within the concept of intersectionality.

As a qualitative study that examined two small cases of the practices of preschool teachers, no generalized conclusions for the Swedish preschools education can be made (Bryman, 2011). The analysis of the result is of course coloured of our own experiences and there are probably many other ways to understand the result, however our focus was on ethnicity, gender and age. The preschool teachers can also have been affected of us and our intention to get certain answers.

4.7 Ethics

The study presented in this paper follows the research ethics criteria outlined by the Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002). These criteria describe four main requirements in terms of ethical principles: information, consent, confidentiality and use requirement. Verbal and written informed consent was obtained from the study participants and they were informed about the research aims. All the participants were informed of their right to withdraw their consent at any time. Every effort was made to guarantee anonymity of the participants. The thesis does not reveal any real names of participants, the field site or any other identifying characteristics. All of the data gathered was used solely for the purposes of this research study.
5. Result

When applying an intersectional perspective in our analyses it revealed similarities among teacher’s from the two preschools regarding their perspectives on children’s competencies with respect to negotiating the content of the children books, as well as differences concerning the role that the books could play in the development of an intercultural education in preschool.

We organize our findings based on themes that emerged in our analyses: Intercultural education and Teachers discussions of gender and competence. Findings discussed under the theme of Intercultural education include observations about the teacher’s practices related to their efforts to work with cultural issues in the preschool, both generally and with respect to using the two books discussed in the focus group. These findings are answers to the two research questions:

- How do teachers in one ethnically diversified preschool describe their experiences of working with children’s books in their daily interaction with children?
- How do teachers in one ethnically homogenous preschool describes their experiences of working with children’s books in their daily interaction with children?

Findings discussed under the theme of Teachers discussions of gender and competence concern the teacher’s ways of talking about social norms/categories, which are showed in the result; in the teachers describings of their practises. This part of the result is leaning more to the aim of this study and show the norms that become visible in the teacher’s conversation regarding children and children books. All the findings, under both headlines, can be understood within the concept of intersectionality.
5.1 Intercultural Education

The reason for selecting two preschools that differed in terms of the number of immigrant background children was to examine what differences, if any, the teachers might describe in terms of their work trying to address issues of culture and diversity in the preschool. Overall, we found that the teachers had a variety of strategies and perspectives regarding what they considered to be the proper approaches to working with cultural issues; however, there were no differences that could be definitively connected to differences in the children population.

We report here anecdotal observations regarding differences in how the teachers thought about the role that the two study books could play in contributing to an intercultural education. With respect to the book, *Den dagen*, we observed that the teachers in the two preschools considered the book to be useful for addressing parent’s involvement. Teachers from the rural preschool saw the book as something that could be used to counter negative descriptions about the children’s experiences that the teachers assumed the children were exposed to at home by their parents. For example, one teacher explained: “*You know how it can be among adults, they talk so much, like*’ we do not want them here’” and then we have to explain for the children, because they only have their parents view on the subject”. Teachers from the urban preschool saw the book in a more positive light, describing it as a tool that could be used to help the parents of immigrant background children discuss their children’s feelings, one teacher said: “I think it is important to have the parent on board. That they are aware that we talk about these things”.

With regard to *Maskerad*, the teachers from the urban preschool expressed the belief that the book would be uncommon to have at a school that had little to no immigrant background children. They reasoned that it would be “strange” for children in such a school to see “all the ethnicities” in the book, but that in a preschool where children with immigrant background were common the book would seem “natural.” One teacher said

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4 “man vet ju också hur det blir bland dom vuxna, det pratas hitan och ditan, vi vill inte ha dom här att för barnen då, förklara för dom har ju bara sina föräldrars SYN på det/ eh:: förklara hur det kan vara/”

5 “då tror jag att det är viktigt att man har med sig föräldrarna också. Att dom är medveten om ATT man tar upp: frågan.”
that in ethnically homogenous areas: “I think the children will react on how they look”6. The teachers from the rural preschool found the book to be a “bit silly” and one teacher said sarcastically “Now we’re going show that it is okay that boys can be princesses. It felt a bit stilted”7 She continued in the same tone; “oh, now we are going to do a book that is not all Swedish, now the characters should be named Mariama and Yosef.”8

Turning now to the broader issue of the teacher’s ideas about intercultural education, in the remainder of this section we treat the issue through the lens of three general themes that emerged: *Intercultural education as a general problem, Intercultural education and children’s books, and Intercultural education and Maskerad and Den dagen.*

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6 “inte på de förskolor där det är naturligt att det ÄR så((…)) så tänker jag. Men är du i de homogena områdena/ då tror jag att barnen skulle reagera/ titta mycket på /det är min åsikt i alla fall/ på hur de ser ut”

7 “Jag tyckte den var lite LARVIG …. OCH VISA OCH VISA att det är ok liksom att killar är prinsessor eh: jag vet inte det kändes lite uppstyltat så på något vis”

8 “nämne kanske också då att man har bestämt sig för att nu ska det inte va en helsvensk BOK utan nu ska dom heta Mariama ååå och Yosef liksom”
5.1.1 Intercultural Education as a General Problem

All of the teachers expressed the opinion that, depending on the cultural “diversity” of a school (whether the number of immigrant background children made the preschool “diverse” or “homogenous”), relevant ways of working with culture needed to be considered. For example, one of the teachers from the rural preschool noted that “you work more integrated when there are children from other countries in the group, then you think more about it in our various thematic areas.”

Only the teachers from the urban preschool described various approaches to developing a culturally sensitive education in their preschool. One important consideration for the teachers was their approach to language. For example, in working with immigrant background children the teachers claimed to use simpler language that was adapted to the children. In addition, they relied a lot on pictures and body language to communicate with the immigrant background children. They also made use of translation programs on the iPad.

Another important consideration for the teachers in the urban school was organizing the environment to help the immigrant background children feel welcome. For example, one teacher said: “We have tried to welcome everybody, in all the spoken languages” she explained it that there is a welcoming board with the word “welcome” written in every speaking language at the preschool. A more specific example involved an activity in which a “flying carpet” activity was organized in which the children could “fly away” and visit the different countries represented by the children in the group. What food is eaten in the country, what music are they listening to, how do they say hello in their language and is it a cold or warm country? One teacher explained that the reason was: "to support the child with another cultural belonging and then we came up with the flying carpet.”

9 “[..]man jobbar ju mer integrerat när det finns barn som kommer från andra länder / för då tänker man ju mer på det och tar in det i verksamheten som olika temaområden och så.”
10 “Men vi har ju försökt att göra ett välkomnande till alla, på alla språk.”
11 “att man skulle ja: / eller stödja barnet i att den kom från en annan kultur och då hittade vi på det här med flygande mattan”
Finally, the teachers in the urban preschool described ways in which they tried to involve
the parents in preschool activities, including securing interpreters to help the parents get
accurate information, and maintaining a “small homemade” library where the children
and their families could borrow books to read at home. The reason is to make parents
read more for their children and also to develop the language.

5.1.2 Intercultural Education and Children Books

Another theme that emerged in the focus group discussions concerned the role that
children’s books in general can play in the development of an intercultural education.
Within this general theme, two specific themes emerged: the use of children’s books for
language development, and the use of children’s books to broaden children’s world.

Regarding the use of children’s books for language development, one teacher at the
urban preschool argued that books were especially useful for engaging multilingual
children. This teacher explained that books provide an opportunity for multilingual
children to discuss and explain stories in more than one language: “Sometimes you want
the children to retell, so you know if they have understood the book or not”12.

Regarding the role that children’s books can play in broadening children’s worlds,
teachers in both the rural and urban preschool complained that it was difficult to find
books that did not include stereotypes, and they talked about the importance to having
books that represented all forms of diversity. For example, one teacher from the urban
preschool discussed the importance of representing the varieties of the children’s family
lives: “Everybody lives in different family constellations and that's the way it is. It should
be a natural part in books, that you can live with two moms instead, that the world looks
different”.13 Another teacher described books as a useful tool because “it can be a good
discussion topic that you can talk about”14. Similarly, another teacher from the rural
preschool argued that “There are so many things that one could bring up in a book. You
could bring up culture and religion, that can actually be more relevant than how you

12 “och sen ibland vill man ju att det ska kunna återberätta så man ser om de förstått boken eller inte”
13 “ja det tror jag absolut. Ja men just det här med olika familjekonstellationer, alla lever ju i olika/ familjeförhållanden/
och så där att det/ blir en naturlig del i böcker och: att man kanske lever med två mammor istället / att världen ser/
annorlunda ut.”
14 “det kan vara bra å/ ett bra diskussionsämne man kan prata”.
They explained it by saying that they think in cultures there can be differences in people’s living conditions e.g. different foods and family constellations and that children also should see that and not only the appearance in the character’s features.

5.1.3 Intercultural Education and Den dagen and Maskerad

The teachers identified a number of potential uses for both the study books with respect to designing and implementing an intercultural education in their preschools.

Regarding Den dagen, the teachers believed that the book could play a role in supporting the social and emotional development of the children. They thought that this book could be used as a help for children to broaden their world and helping children understand other people’s perspectives e.g. sympathize with others situations and experiences. For example, one teacher at the rural preschool saw the migration narrative in the book as meaningful because: “the children can get an understanding about what the newly arrived children have gone through. You cannot know that, and as a child, you live in a secure world and that is something you should be able to do. But at the same time it is hard to understand what others have gone through.” However, the same teacher from the rural school also said that using the book to help children understand others, was only suitable in preschools with refugee children: “maybe the book can be useful at those preschools [...] we do not have any refugees to relate to here, it can be difficult”

The teachers from the urban preschool also noted that Den dagen could, in addition to helping children think about the lives of others, be used to help children cope with difficult feelings and emotions. For instance, one teacher from the rural preschool noted an aspect of the narrative in which one of the bird characters dies and that is something that some children can have experienced. Similarly, another teacher from the urban preschool saw Den dagen as useful for helping children process challenging personal experiences: “you can pick out certain parts to talk about, but it can be difficult to pick them out, because in a way, you don’t want it to be too much feelings. If the children have had it tough, it can

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15 “Det finns ju så mycket man skulle kunna ta upp i en bok, man skulle ju kunna ta upp just det kulturella och // och religioner och sånt som kanske är mer relevant egentligen än än har man ser ut.”

16 “För att dom ska få förståelse för vad dom här nya barnen har fått gå IGENOM// för det// det vet man ju inte alltså så som barn lever man ju i en skyddad värld och det SKA man ju också få göra// men det är också svårt då och förstå vad dom andra har gått igenom.”

17 “Boken skulle ju den här funka KANSKE på förskolorna där// [...] här har vi ju inga flyktingar och relatera till så det är svårt”
be hard to be reminded, that is how I think”.
Therefore, the teachers from the urban preschool mention that they would be careful to the story in *Den dagen* if not involving the parent, because it can be too emotional and hard for children who has experienced fleeing, one teacher said: “I think it is important to have the parent on board. That they are aware that you bring up the question”. Finally, with regard to *Den dagen*, teachers at both the urban and rural preschools used the book to make the general argument that the suitability of a children’s book for a child depends on whether or not there are similarities between the narrative in the book and the personal history of the child. Specifically, some teacher’s noted that the story of *Den dagen* would be easier to understand and recognise for children who have had similar experiences like the ones in the book. A teacher from the urban school said that they could use the book in her school “when it comes newly arrived children, you can decompose the book and work with it, because everyone has approximately the same situation”. A teacher at the rural school argued that “I'm sure it would work in a multicultural preschool, where it is children that have experienced it”.

Like *Den dagen*, the book *Maskerad* was seen by the teachers as addressing multiple educational and social uses in the preschool. The teachers noted several uses for *Maskerad* that they also noted for *Den dagen*. For example, teachers from both preschools considered the book to be useful for talking about emotions and for helping children take another child’s perspective. The actions in the book could help the children to empathise and feel with others in daily situations e.g. one teacher from the rural preschool say that she in the book would focus on: “the cooperation, that they solve conflicts, that they share and intermingled and that they compromise”. Similarly, one of the teachers from the urban preschool argued that they could use this book as a reference since the children are a bit ego-centric and have trouble to understand others feeling. She

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18 “Plocka ut vissa delar och prata med dem om. Men som det är ju svårt sanna bitar för man vil ju inte att det ska bli för mkt känslor heller på något sätt /om barn som har haft det tufft så kan det nog bli jobbigt att bli påmind/ så tänker jag men det.”
19 “Då tror jag att det är viktigt att man har med sig föräldrarna också. Att dom är medveten om ATT man tar upp: frågan”
20 “När det kommer mycket nyanlända barn. bryta ner den på ett annat sätt och jobba med den / För har ju alla ungefär samma situation / kanske”
21 “Annars tror jag säkert den skulle funka i en mångkulturell förskola där det faktiskt finns barn som har erfarenheter själva av ”
22 “Samarbete eller liksom dom löser konflikter genom att// att dom DELAR och dom// dom samsas liksom om det och dom KOMPROMISSAR::”
explained: “You do it all the time, if they are not kind to each other and how would you feel if someone came and pulled your hair?”

One area where the teachers saw a difference in the two books was in their tone. The teachers considered the general tone of *Maskerad* to be different from *Den dagen*, with *Maskerad* being more light-hearted and connected to everyday events as compared to the more serious orientation of *Den dagen*. The events in *Maskerad*, as one teacher in the urban preschool described it, were everyday events “*that happen all the time.*” The same teacher saw the book as useful for talking and teaching about topics along the lines that you do not “*throw bricks and bite others.*”

### 5.2 Teachers Discussions of Gender and Competence

In this section we will focus on the teacher’s discussion about: *Gender* and *Competence: Age, Familiarity, and Stereotypes*. Analysis from an intersectional perspective of the teacher’s discussions about the two study books revealed an emphasis by the teachers on issues not primarily on ethnicity, as we had anticipated, but also of gender and children’s competence (as it relates to age). In general, the teachers viewed age, familiarity, and stereotypes as crucial factors that influenced children’s ability to understand and relate to the narratives and characters of the study books and for understanding unfamiliar situations. At the same time, when discussing *Maskerad*, the preschool teachers focused on the topic of gender, as compared to ethnicity, which was a central emphasis in the book.

#### 5.2.1 Gender

Broadly speaking, the teacher’s discussions about gender focused on their perspectives regarding the differences between children’s and parent’s perceptions of gender. The teachers in both preschools argued that gender is not an issue that the children think about, rather it is something that the parents and preschool teachers are sensitive to. However, when the teachers were asked if they think the children can identify themselves

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23 “Ja men det gör man ju hela tiden/ om de inte är snälla mot varandra och hur skulle du känna: om någon kom och drog dig i häret och lite så”

24 “Det är ju sånt som händer hela tiden”.

25 “Inte kasta klossar, inte bita”
with the book, all teachers said that they could and one teacher from the urban school said that “This that the boy likes to be a princess” could be something to identify with.

Gender emerged as a topic of discussion in both focus groups when the book *Maskerad* was introduced. This was unexpected as the researcher focus of the book is on cultural diversity. In all cases, the teacher’s attention to gender was elicited by a minor character in the book, Yosef, the boy who wants to wear a dress. Yosef is not really active in the book as compared to the girl Mariama, the main character. Yosef is “just” crying and lying on the floor; however, all of the preschool teachers discussed this character, pointing to him as the focus of the book. For example, one preschool teacher in the rural preschool observed “it is weird that the book doesn’t go all in, when the boy wants the dress. He only gets half of it, so it would be ok. Why don’t go the whole way?” At the same time, another teacher from the rural preschool said “I don’t know if I focus that much on if it is the boys that wear the skirt” but still they mention it several times. One teacher from the urban preschool says that their children “do not care if a boy wears a dress”.

When the teacher from the rural preschool gave examples in the book, they talk about girls as a collective and boys as individuals. Furthermore, when they talked about gender they mostly referred to male persons. Boys were individually called fictional, typical Swedish names (like Olle or Kalle) but girls were just collectively called girls.

### 5.2.2 Competence: Age, Familiarity and Stereotypes

As noted, all of the teachers involved issues of children’s competence in their evaluations of the study books. Broadly there was agreement among the teachers that *Den dagen* was more suitable for older children (age five-six) while *Maskerad* was seen as more suitable for children one to three years of age (the age range of the children the teachers worked with). How teachers defined the suitability of the books depended on a variety of factors including their ideas about the children’s age, their capacity for understanding the books, as well as their ideas about the emotional sensitivity of the children.

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26 "Nä men det här att pojken gillar att vara prinsessa."
27 "Det är konstigt att man inte går all in på boken när man ändå ska ha eh::: att killen ska få klänning, så får han bara ha hälften liksom för att det ska få va ok (skrattar) varför kör man inte hela racet då?"
28 "Sen vet jag inte om jag fokuserar så mycket på att det är pojkar som tar på sig KJOLEN,"
29 "Här bryr det ju sig inte om ifall pojkar går i klänning"
The teacher’s saw the children’s age as a critical factor for determining if and how the children could understand and relate to the book. In general, the teachers believed that the younger the child is, the less capable they were of interpreting and relating to the book. When discussing Den dagen teachers at the urban preschool said that small children could not understand another human's perspective. For example, one teacher argued that “our children are so young, the oldest children are three, but with the older children I think it could work” A teacher in the urban preschool noted that age would be a factor for her to motivate “modifying” how she presented the book to the children. One teacher from the urban preschool mention that “depending on the children's age, if they are young and the book is difficult, you will simplify the story”.  

The teachers from the rural preschool also think that their children are too young and one of them expressed: “many children probably don’t know what a refugee is, and then you can’t relate, if you don’t know”. When we asked them if they could use Den dagen, one teacher answered: ”definitely not with the youngest children, there is a lot of text in the book and I don’t think they make that connection”. She continued “If I had worked with five to six years old and if I had a reason for it, I think it is difficult for the children to relate to”.  

Furthermore, with regard to the connection between age and competency, the teachers claimed that for the younger children topics like gender, ethnicity and migration were not topics they thought about. One teacher from the urban preschool continued to say that “they do not have that picture of the world, that you can be fleeing, they can’t associate with that. And that is what you are supposed to associate with, to leave your home” and therefore it can be hard for them to understand the book and she continued: “I think our children can have difficulties to think like that, about the books message [...] I think you have to be older to understand the message”. Teacher’s from the two preschools do not think the children react to gender or ethnicity in books. For example, one teacher from

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30 “Sen är ju som sagt våra små dom största är// dom äldsta är ju 3 eh:: men med dom lite äldre barnen skulle tror jag den skulle funka”
31 “Sen är det lite vilken ålder det är// är det en för svår bok då tar man ju / och förenklar den om /det är en yngre.”
32 “Och många barn vet nog inte vad en flykting är// så är det ju inte att relatera om man inte vet”
33 “Definitivt inte på småbarn// dels:: så är det mycket text och sen så// den kopplingen gör dom ju inte/”
34 “Hade jag jobbat med fem till sex åringar kanske:: OCH jag fick en anledning till DET eh: jag tror att den är svår och // kunna för barnen att relatera till”
35 “Dom har ju inte den världsbilden heller nå men de här: med /att man är på flykt att man kan associera med / det är ju // det man ska associera med /att man blir bort föst ja”
36 “Tror att våra barn har lite svårt att tänka så/. Vad den har för budskap [...] jag tror att man måste vara äldre för att förstå budskapet i boken.”
the urban preschool said: "I don’t think that the smaller children think about this, it can be the older children who does [...] to reflect on boys and girls". 37

In addition to the category of age, the teachers also evaluated the suitability of the books in terms of what they believed was familiar to the children. For example, with respect to the book Maskerad all of the teachers from the two preschools considered the book to be suitable for their children, because it is about everyday situations in preschool. For example, one teacher from the urban preschool said: "this book was more easy-going", and she added that she had experienced the actions of Maskerad this morning. With respect to Den dagen, teachers in both preschools reasoned that the book would be suitable for ‘refugee children’ because of the fact that they have lived through experiences depicted in the book, and therefore could relate to the book. Interestingly, the teachers in the rural school argued that Den dagen could be used with “Swedish children” to help give them an understanding of “refugees children's” experiences; however, these teachers did not mention if age, in this situation, would make a difference.

Surprisingly, teachers from the rural preschool argued that they thought it was easier for children to identify with and understand stereotypical characters in books. For example, one teacher explained: “I think that most of the children have an easier time identify with the stereotyped characters, because that's the way it is. 38 This kind of explanation was used by her, with support from the other teachers, to argue that it was acceptable to have books with stereotypical depictions – that is, because the stereotypes depict was the most common, then the children will have an easier time relating to the book precisely because it is what is most common that the children would presumably be familiar with. Furthermore, the teacher implied that if children never can relate or identify with the characters or the story in the book, reading would not be amusing for children. When they were asked if they think children are looking to identify themselves in books one teacher answered: "I don't think they do it consciously39 and she continued to say that the children in their group still are young and have not developed their identity. The children are still very influenced by their parents.

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37 "Det tror jag inte de små barnen tänker på hellet/ kan nog vara dom större barnen[…]att man reflektar kring. pojk och flicka”
38 “Jag tror att dom flesta: kan nog haättare och identifiera sig med dom stereotypa, för det är lite så det ÄR”
39 "Inte medvetet tror jag inte (väldigt tyst).”
In a seeming contradiction, the same teacher from the rural preschool that argued about the value of stereotypes in books also complained that books with other ethnicities often can be exaggerated in their depictions of stereotypes. For example, one teacher noted that:” there is a flat image when they bring in a different ethnicity, there is someone with a big afro hair [...] it is a little bit excessive [...] it is not just a little bit different”. 40 She continued to say that this is problematic and” well, it is not like it is a boy from Poland who look like us, it is often more excessive”. 41 When the researchers asked if they thought children would reflect on only seeing “Swedish” characters, one teacher from the urban preschool answered: “I think they do when they are a little bit older”. 42 They mention that they do not think small children think about ethnicity in books, it is not their focus. However, they think it is important for children to recognise themselves in books, one teacher said:” it is important to feel [...] that you can identify yourself in the book [...] someone looks like me, reminds of how I look” 43.

40 “Schablonbild där också, när dom väl tar in nån annan etnicitet så är den nån mörk med STORT afro här som ska (…) jamen det LITE ÖVERDRIVET (…) eller annorlunda det är liksom inte bara LITE annorlunda utan det ska va //”
41 “Jamen det blir så // a / det är ingen pojke från POLEN som ser ut som oss utan oftast // lite ÖVERDRIVET”
42 “Lite högre upp i åldern så tror jag att det gör de”
43 “Ja det är viktigt att man själv kan känna [...] att man kan identifiera sig med någon i boken [...] någon ser ut som jag, påminner om hur jag ser ut.”
6. Discussion

In the result section we have described how the teachers from the two preschools experiences their practises and how they work with children books. It is also, in the result, described which norms that became visible in the analysis of the teachers expressions about their practices. Our findings raise questions concerning the implications for intercultural education and intersectionality of teacher’s views about what children can understand with respect to cultural issues in the preschool. Of specific importance were our observations regarding how the teachers thought and talked about the children’s intellectual and emotional competencies and how these perspectives might influence the decisions teachers make about if and how they work with cultural issues in the preschool. In this discussion we examine the implications of these (intersectional) perspectives with regard to the limits they place on teachers approaches to intercultural education, and to the general apprehension that preschool teachers might feel about bringing up culturally sensitive topics in the preschool. In the discussion we try to highlight the norms that where showed in the result and how these can intersect with each other and affect the teachers work and interaction with the children.

6.1 Teacher’s Ideas about Children’s Intellectual and Emotional Competence: Limits to Teachers’ Approaches to Intercultural Education

A core principle guiding an intersectional perspective is the understanding that people’s identities are formed by the simultaneous interaction (“intersection”) of social categories (Bhopal & Preston, 2012; Lykke, 2003). Typically, when we think of these categories we think of race, gender, class, sexuality, age, disability and religion. What the current research highlights, particularly with respect to questions of early childhood education, is that intellectual and emotional competence are also categories involved in this formation of a person’s identity. It was clear that the teachers in this study assumed that the children they work with had certain limits with respect to what they could understand intellectually as well as what they could perceive and be interested in. As we saw, these assumptions
seemed to have an important influence on how the teachers worked and talked about cultural issues in the preschool, especially concerning the use of children’s books in general, and the two study books specifically.

An overriding theme related to competence that emerged in the teacher’s discussions of the study books was the general claim by the teachers that younger children (those in particular in the age range cared for by the teachers, one to three years) could not understand or have interest in topics of culture. The teachers also made claims that suggested limitations of competence for those children that were capable of appreciating the study books. For example, the teachers argued that in order for children to understand or engage with a book, they must have prior experience with the kinds of events represented in the book. This was the logic we saw when the teachers in the rural school suggested using _Den dagen_ as a tool for giving the “ethnic Swedish” children a view of the immigrant children’s history, that would counter potentially negative views of the immigrant experience that the parents might communicate. We also saw this when the teachers in the urban preschool claimed that children who had migrated would be more interested in and better able to appreciate the story of _Den dagen_. More problematic were the contradictory observations of the teachers in the rural preschool regarding stereotypical representations in children’s books. On the one hand, the teachers argued that children could more easily relate to characters that were depicted stereotypically. On the other hand, they complained about the lack of non-stereotyped characters in the books they saw.

How can we understand this and how does this way of thinking about children's competence affect the way that teachers design activities for the children that can help the children develop healthy identities? We agree with Martinsson and Reimers (2014) - that we/children can have multiple identities depending on context – and with Stern’s (2000) theory of identity and self-development which promotes a view that it is the external factors, i.e. communication and interaction with others, that affect our constructions of self. Within the concept of intersectionality, all these meeting of norms creates the ways we look at ourselves through others and together with others. So the teacher’s ways of talking or not talking about norms and social categories, together with their thinking about what children are competent to do, can affect how the children see themselves and therefore, how they develop their identities. Since norms affect the way people talk about others, it
also affects how people think about others (Nordenmark & Rosén, 2008). We believe it is important to help teachers reflect on if and how they talk about norms with the children.

We view children’s competencies from the perspective outlined by Stern (2000): children are competent and through interactions with others, children develop their identity. Stern (ibid) argues that the “sense of self” is within persons from the day they are born, and therefore, to say that children do not think or notice gender or ethnicities in books are not compatible to what we know about children’s identity development, since we think that it is the meeting between people that develops people. Given this view of identity development it is important for teachers to consider how children can recognize themselves in books. As Riis – Pedersen (2011) argues, regardless of ethnic background it is important for children to be exposed to character representations they can identify themselves with. So even though you are young, you need to find identity marks that can help you create a broad identity. So if, in childrens books, the characters that you can identify with are seen as something different from the normative, how are you going to create a healthy identity?

6.2 Stereotypes, Ethnicity, and Teacher’s Apprehension Toward Addressing Cultural Issues in Preschool.

Another key question raised by our findings concerns if and to what degree the teachers were apprehensive about discussing cultural and ethnic issues in the preschool. This question was raised for us in two ways. First, contrary to our expectations of how the teachers would discuss the two study books, the teachers focused their discussion on social categories like gender and family, rather than on ethnicity. Second, the teachers also offered a variety of explanations for why it was not necessary for them to address issues of culture in their own practises (with the topic of competence being the chief explanation). What can explain this seeming apprehension by the teachers to address issues of culture?

Pollock (2004) argues that teachers may be apprehensive to discuss issues of ethnicity and culture in the classroom because they fear being misunderstood as racist. The teachers from both preschools had hesitations connected to Den dagen i.e. their thinking of the books story regarding refugees and ethnicities. We think this can have similarities to what Pollock (2004) talks about: that there is a tension in talking about race and ethnicity because some
experience that subject as something that can be seen as racist. But at the same time, in order to avoid inequality, it is important to talk about this subject in preschool (ibid).

Evidence of possible teacher hesitation can be seen for example in the following observation from one of the rural preschool teachers who was trying to explain under what conditions she would use a book like Den dagen: “If I had worked with five to six years old AND if I had a reason for IT”. A teacher from the urban preschool also qualified her proposals for how to use the study books differently: “I think it is important to have the parent on board. That they are aware THAT you bring up the question”. These kinds of justifications from the urban preschool teachers we consider to be more positive, since they focus on the child's feelings and wellbeing. Pollock (2004) argues that it is important for children to hear teachers talk about ethnicity. Similarly, Omma (2013) points out that discrimination and avoiding of talking about race and ethnicity can lead to physical and psychological illness. Preschool teacher’s hesitation to engage with cultural issues - for example choosing not to use certain books in the preschool – can have consequences for every child's possibility to construct their identity. Being invisible or being stereotyped contributes to how we can construct our identity (Martinsson, 2014).

Another finding that we interpret as suggestive of teachers’ reluctance to engage with cultural issues regards the observations that the teachers made about the book Maskerad. As we noted, the teachers in both schools focused on the issue of gender, rather than on the issue of ethnicity which was foregrounded in the book. Specifically, the teachers focused on the minor character of Yosef, the boy who wishes to wear a dress. We argue that this focus on gender by the teachers is a reflection of their values and norms. Our interpretation is that the teachers have a difficult time to address this book. Can it be so that the teachers struggle with the gender norm here, that the boy wants to wear the dress? The Swedish preschool curriculum advocates for teachers to promote gender equality. Norms do not only exist to cause pain or harm (Dolk, 2013; Martinsson & Reimers, 2014), but we think that when the teachers repeatedly confirm the norm and what is going against the norm they risk consolidate them, even though that's not necessarily the intention.
6.3 Teachers’ Efforts to Develop Intercultural Education: Positioning in Activities that did not Involve Books.

One piece of evidence revealing that the teachers had a restricted view of the children’s competencies for understanding, relating, and even noticing issues of culture came from the work of the teachers in the urban school. As we noted, one example of the teacher’s efforts to address issues of culture in their practice involved the use of the flying carpet activity. The basic idea was to provide a pretend situation in which the children fly on the carpet and visit different countries to learn about the different features of the country, including cultural qualities (e.g., is it a cold or warm country, what food is eaten, what music are they listening to, how do they say hello in their language). However, as Gruber (2008) notes, an activity of this kind gives the teacher a power to “position” the child in a way that essentializes the child to be a representative of his/her country’s culture. With the teacher in a sense doing the work of “giving” the child his/her culture, we can see this as another example that suggests the teachers consider the children as not competent to independently work with cultural issues in the preschool. Furthermore, we think it is problematic to position a child in one culture without knowing if that child wants to be connected to that culture.

The flying carpet example illustrates what Lunneblad (2013) describes as a compensatory approach to working with cultural issues in the classroom. It is not intercultural education as Lahdenperä (2004) describes it, in which there is an active effort to sustain interaction among the cultures. It leans more to being multicultural education and simply that the cultures co-exists without necessarily interacting (Fjällhed, 2012). Then it is often learning about a culture instead of learning between cultures (ibid).

In the end, the teacher’s views about the children’s lack of competence to work with cultural issues makes the kind of cultural integration that Bozarslan (2001) describes – one that is a dynamic and dialogic process of mutual sharing between the “old” and “new” culture – more difficult to achieve in preschool in Sweden. While the teachers may be well intentioned, wanting children to learn about other cultures, it is important to make them sensitive to the potential effects on children’s identity development of not carefully reflecting on these kinds of cultural tasks.
The aim of this research was to examine how an intersectional perspective could provide insights about teacher’s work and talk around cultural issues and children’s books, insights that could in turn contribute to the broader pedagogical project of developing intercultural education in preschool. The arguments and observations identified in the focus group interviews show that when teachers think about the problem of intercultural education, they are concerned about the degree to which children are intellectually and emotionally competent to understand and be interested in cultural issues. The teachers from the urban preschool said that their children were too young and therefore can have difficulties to think about the message in the book. Similar with this the teachers from the rural preschool expressed that if the children were older and if the teachers were given a reason to use the books they could, but definitely not with the youngest children. Those expressions from the two preschools can be a legitimate concern that at the same time challenges the arguments favoring exposing children to cultural issues in preschool.

As we noted, Stern’s (2000) ideas about self and identity development suggest that, counter to what the teachers in our study argued, very young children have competencies for being able to engage with sensitive cultural issues. In addition to this, we should consider other perspectives that recognize children as more competent than adults usually give them credit for. For example, the Reggio Emilia approach, as described by Dahlberg (2011) argues for understanding children as competent in ways that goes beyond the kind of text based learning that is valued in school: “children have a hundred language and we are born with many opportunities, expressions and abilities – they all inspire and depend on one another – but it is easy to lose them in the school system”. Dahlberg (2011) goes on to say that the Reggio philosophy see children as creating their own knowledge together with one another. That children are co-researchers and co-constructers. In this sense we are always in construction and even the youngest child is competent and a constructor (ibid).

Our aim from the beginning was to research ethnicity in books, however the teachers focus was mostly on competence in relation to age. Our study highlighted potential problems to developing an intercultural education in preschool. It also had some problems of its own. One question raised by our method is whether the teacher’s concerns about children’s
competence were specific to books. Is it possible that the teachers see the children as competent to work with cultural issues in other kinds of activities? In the playground? During lunchtime? In organized activities? Our study concerned children books, but it could be relevant in future research to address and observe other activities in preschools.

Furthermore, the use and structure of the focus group as a method should also be reconsidered. With topics as sensitive and controversial as ethnicity, culture, and race, it is a challenge to elicit sincere opinions and observations from a group of participants, particularly a group consisting of teachers who work together every day. Regardless of the kind of interview method chosen, a future study into this topic should complement the interview data with field observations. This would allow the researcher to understand how teachers work with cultural issues in their actual practice, and not just based on what the teacher tells the researcher. At the same time, field observation would allow the researcher to evaluate if the teachers work in legitimately intercultural ways in areas other than the one that was focused on the study (in this case, books).

We have tried to show through an intersectional perspective the various norms and social categories that the teachers were sensitive to (gender, age, familiarity, for example). What do all these norms and categories (intersections) combined, offer for possibilities and limits to a child for creating an identity? We cannot know the outcome, but all these norms combined creates a frame in which we can create our identity. A child is not only their gender, or age or ethnicity. A child is all of these things and it is reconstructed within different contexts and times. Therefore, teachers should be aware of the norms they carry with them and pass on, since they will affect the children, even though they are young.
8. References


till likabehandling. Linköping: Olika.


Samtycke för vuxen till deltagande i studentforskning
Förskollärarutbildningen – Examens arbete (LEXP16v16) – Våren 2016

Maria Hyltse och Hanna Persson genomför en studie i kursen Examensarbete inom ramen för förskollärarprogrammet vid Jönköping University. Övergripande fokus i studien är att undersöka pedagogiska och didaktiska frågor rörande förskolans policy och praktik. Mer specifikt handlar denna studie om att undersöka hur barns identitet utvecklas i mötet med barnböcker.

Maria Hyltse och Hanna Persson genomför denna studie i syfte att (a) bidra till kunskap om förskolan och dess verksamhet; (b) få erfarenheter av att genomföra empirisk forskning inom utbildning och undervisning; och (c) fullgöra kraven för att bli examinerad från förskollärarprogrammet på Högskolan för Lärande och Kommunikation vid Jönköping University.

Om du accepterar att delta i denna studie kommer du att bli tillfrågad om att delta i en eller flera av följande aktiviteter:

_____ Delta i en intervju/intervjuer relaterat till forskningsämnet.
_____ Du ger din tillåtelse att bli observerad under dagliga aktiviteter i förskolan.

All information som genereras kommer att anonymiseras vilket garanterar att du inte kan bli identifierad. Dessutom kommer all information som genereras förvaras på ett säkert sätt som förhindrar att det försvinner t ex genom stöld.

Du har din fulla rätt att avbryta deltagande samt att ta tillbaka samtycke när som helst och utan några påföljder.

Om du har frågor gällande den här undersökningen och/eller ditt deltagande, vänligen kontakta kursansvarig, Robert Lecusay (robert.lecusay@ju.se), eller examinator, Monica Nilsson (monica.nilsson@ju.se)

Om du accepterar att delta, vänligen skrivunder nedan.

Deltagarens kontaktinformation, telefon och/eller email:

______________________________________________________________

Datum

______________________________________________________________

Deltagarens signatur

Studentens namn

______________________________________________________________

Namnförtydligande

Namnförtydligande
10. Appendix 2

Uppstartar frågor/Starting questions

- Hur länge har du arbetat i förskola? How long have you been working in preschools?
- Hur länge har ni arbetat ihop? How long have you been working together as a group?
- Vad har du arbetat innan? Where have you been working before?
- Har du erfarenhet av att arbeta i mångkulturellt området? Do you have experience of working in a multicultural area?
- Har ni erfarenheter av att arbeta i homogena eller heterogena områden? Do you have experience of working in homogeneous or heterogeneous areas?
- Hur väljer ni böckerna? How do you choose the books?
- Kan du berätta om en typisk bok situation? Can you tell us about a typical book situation is designed?

Categories/questions for our chosen books

- Vad tyckte ni om böckerna? What did you think about this two books?
- Vad tyckte ni andra om boken? How do you think about this book?
- Hur skulle ni använda boken i barngruppen? How would you use the books with the children?
- Vilka barn kan identifiera sig i boken? Kan alla göra det? Which children can identify themselves in the book? Can everyone do that?
- Vad tror ni det betyder för barn att få möta olika böcker med olika innehåll? What do you think it means for children to meet different books with different content?
- Vilka erfarenheter tror ni att de kan få med sig? What experience do you think they can get?
- Hur tänker ni kring att ge barn tillgång till böcker som ger möjligheter att relatera till/identifiera sig med? How do you plan on giving children access to books that provide opportunities to relate/identify with?

Avslutning/Closure

- Hur tror ni att böcker och läsning kan bidra till barns identitetskapande? How do you think that books and reading can contribute to the child's identity development?