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There's No Place Like Home

A case study about care, domestic curriculum, and
professionalism in the toddler department of a Swedish
Montessori preschool

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Abstract

Children are intimately connected with notions of home and yet in Sweden the majority of young children spend increasing amounts of time in institutionalised care and education. Whereas once these institutions were to be modelled on the home, an ongoing professionalisation project appears to be leading to the schoolification of preschools as feminine-coded reproductive work holds less status than male-coded pedagogy. This has led to concern regarding a “domestic vacuum” being created in children’s lives as much of the educative functions of home become lost, including the learning of what it means to care and be cared for in close relationships with others.

Inspired by care feminism, and borrowing Jane Roland Martin’s concept of a Schoolhome, this thesis uses a case study approach of a Swedish Montessori preschool to explore the place of care and domesticity in early years education. A qualitative analysis of observations, interviews, and documents indicates how the creation of a Schoolhome, where care, concern, connection, and domesticity are prioritised, may indeed be possible within contemporary Swedish early years provision, but is highly dependent upon the practitioners’ own convictions regarding the importance of home for young children and the value of the reproductive work performed therein. As such, if the private sphere of home is not valued by practitioners, as it remains unvalued by society at large, preschools may continue to distance themselves from notions of home, thereby reproducing the devaluing of the feminine.

Keywords: Early years, feminist ethic of care, Montessori, pedagogy of care, professionalism, reproductive work, Schoolhome

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1. Introduction

Children's lives in Sweden are lived in preschool institutions. In 2017, 94.4% of four- to five-year-olds and 83.8% of one- to three-year-olds were enrolled in early childhood education in Sweden (Skolverket n.d.), spending as much as eight to eleven hours a day in preschool (Carlberg et al. 2012). Preschools have moved from playing a marginal role in Swedish society to being a place that children are expected to attend, leading Halldén (2007) to conclude that preschool has become the place for modern childhood. Instead of, as Swedish feminist Ellen Key (1909) envisioned in the early 1900s, returning children to the care of the home and supporting parents (read: mothers) in their carework, children are handed over to state care where the institutionalised childhood has become the norm (Halldén 2007).

Children continue to be intimately connected with family life and notions of home (Markström 2014) and yet they are spending increasingly less time in their home environments as fewer parents care for their children full-time (Sverige 2006; Waldenström 2014). Martin (1995a:210) says that this creates a “domestic vacuum” in children's lives as much of the educative functions of home are lost. How can children develop an understanding of what it means to create and maintain a home when so much of their time is spent in environments that lack such classification? The answer, according to Martin (ibid.), lies in the creation of a “schoolhome,” a surrogate home for children, with an emphasis on domesticity and the three Cs; care, concern, and connection.

This thesis is based on the premise that care and domesticity are important aspects of early childhood. After all, as Noddings (2003:30) says, “Consider one major task faced by every adult – that of making a home.” Quality of life is not solely dependent on future success in the public arena of work, but also rests on the types of homes we come from and those we are able to create ourselves (Martin 1995a; Noddings 2002). According to Noddings (2002:27), “Our most treasured human capacities are nurtured in families or homelike groups.” Inspired

by Ellen Key, care feminism, and the work of Jane Roland Martin and Nel Noddings, this study explores the place of care and domesticity in Swedish preschools as I look for signs of a place that may be likened to Martin's Schoolhome, where care is prioritised and children participate in both productive *and* reproductive work¹.

There has long been a home discourse in Swedish preschools (Carlsson & Johansson 2000; Markström 2007, 2014; Nordin-Hultman 2004). Indeed, preschools were previously called “daghem” (dagis), which translates literally as “day home.” These daycare centres provided care to children at a time when increasing numbers of women entered the labour market (Markström 2014). According to Markström (ibid.:52), if children could not be in their own homes, at least they could be in another “home” together with other children and a “day mother” (dagmamma). In daycare, children would receive care in a calm, cosy environment where they would engage in activities associated with the home (Carlsson & Johansson 2000; Markström 2014; Tallberg Broman 1995). The home was to be the model for the “good institution,” not the school (Tallberg Broman (1995:76).

In 1996, responsibility for preschools shifted from the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs to the Swedish Ministry of Education and Science, becoming integrated within education as the first step in lifelong learning (Jönsson et al. 2012). In 1998, the first preschool curriculum was introduced, placing emphasis on pedagogical practice (Skolverket 1998). A third revision of this curriculum is due to be implemented in July 2019 (Skolverket 2018a). The word “teaching” (undervisning) is included for the first time, further emphasising the educative function of preschools. An increasingly dominant pedagogical discourse is

1 Reproductive labour is defined as the activities associated with maintaining life on a daily basis, such as caring for children, cooking, cleaning, and purchasing household goods. This work is associated with the private sphere of home and may be commodified or decommodified depending on time and place (Acker 2006). Reproductive work is disproportionately performed by women and is essential for the maintenance of the economy and the labour force (ibid.).

becoming ever apparent as the discourse of home risks being pushed to the margins or extinguished entirely (Markström 2014; Vallberg Roth 2006).

Whilst preschools may be placing ever greater emphasis on pedagogical activities, it should be noted that the curriculum is built on a model of *educare*, a combination of care and education (Bruce & Riddersporre 2012; Jönsson et al. 2012; Lidholt 2000). The intention remains that preschool will be characterised by equal parts care and education, but what is being seen is a move towards schoolification, with care being given a subordinated position (Lidholt 2000; Löfdahl & Folke-Fichtelius 2015; Löfgren 2016). When care is referred to, it is increasingly likely that the focus will be on care as an educational tool (Löfdahl & Folke-Fichtelius 2015; Löfgren 2016).

The fact that preschools are increasingly described from an educational perspective is viewed as being positive in terms of the status afforded to preschool teachers (Berntsson 1999, 2000, 2006; Enö 2011). In striving towards professionalisation, it is deemed important to emphasise that teachers are not simply replicating the work performed in the private sphere of home (Ahrenkiel et al. 2013; Berntsson 1999, 2000; Löfgren 2016). The centrality of caregiving in preschools is regarded as being too closely related to the private sphere, mothering, homemaking, and the “soft” skills culturally associated with women’s nature to warrant professional status. Emphasis, therefore, must be placed on pedagogics if professional status is to be achieved, relegating care to the position of a “noisy silence” (Löfgren 2016).

1.1 Research Aim and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to examine the place of Martin’s domestic curriculum and the three Cs within Swedish preschools, given that the notion of the Schoolhome may be viewed as problematic in terms of the professionalisation project in early childhood education.

The research will be guided by the following questions:

1. What are the key features of early years practice with one- to three-year-olds?
2. How do early years practitioners express the three Cs in practice?
3. How do teachers perceive the practices of care and domesticity in terms of their work and professionalisation?
4. How does the current early years policy in Sweden prohibit the possibility of creating a Schoolhome?

1.2 A Note on Positionality

The research study is bound within a specific context, Sweden. I enter into this context as an Irish mother and teacher who has lived here for seven years. Although my degree and training in early years and Montessori pedagogy have both been received in Sweden, and I have an insider perspective of what it means to work in, and have children in, Swedish preschools, I remain an outsider to the nuances of Swedish culture and what care means in the everyday context of the Swedish home. That being said, an outsider perspective has the potential to enrich the study, not due to any claim of objectivity (Blommaert & Jie 2010), but rather through the provision of fresh insights into dilemmas that those positioned close to the problem may fail to see.

1.3 Structure of the Thesis

Following the introduction, chapter 2 looks at previous research on the issues addressed in this thesis. Additionally, I further contextualise the research by discussing the history of early years provision in Sweden and women's role within it. Chapter 3 outlines the theoretical concepts guiding the research, before chapter 4 introduces the methods employed in collecting and analysing the research material. Chapter 5 presents and analyses the findings, followed by the final chapter, which concludes with a discussion of the implications of the findings for early years practice and policy.

2. Background and Literature Review

This section contextualises the research by presenting the literature that has informed the study. It is the story of how the research came about. I begin by presenting an overview of the history of Swedish preschools, which is essential in understanding the position of care and home within early childhood education today. Following this, I direct my attention towards preschool teachers' professionalisation project, which I argue plays an important role in how care and home are viewed within the current preschool context. Finally, I lift some of the voices that express concern over what is seen as an overemphasis on learning at the expense of care, as well as some of the voices that suggest that care remains the primary focus of early childhood.

2.1 Historical Background

Swedish preschools date back to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, a period characterised by industrialisation and urbanisation (O'Dowd 2013; Tallberg Broman 1995). Industrialisation led to a dislocation of home and work, which had effects on women's employment and children's place in society. As women's labour market participation increased, so too did the demand for childcare (Bergqvist 2016; Vallberg Roth 2006).

In the middle of the 1800s, the first crèches (barnkrubba) were started in Sweden. These crèches were dependent on donations and philanthropy and provided care for working-class families, including the children of single mothers (Tallberg Broman 1995). According to Axelsson and Qvorsebo (2010), the focus of the crèches was on care, with no larger pedagogical ambition.

During the start of the 1900s, a kindergarten movement developed across Europe, inspired by the work of Friedrich Fröbel. During this time, free kindergartens (folkbarntädgårdar) were introduced in Sweden by Ellen and Maria Moberg, two sisters who were inspired by Fröbel's work. The Moberg sisters are regarded as the pioneers of the Swedish preschool and the kindergartens are

viewed as the precursor to today's childcare institutions due to their emphasis on play, upbringing, and education (Axelsson & Qvarsebo 2010).

Vallberg Roth (2006) describes childcare during the period from the end of the 19th century to the middle of the 20th as being dominated by "The Curriculum of the Good Home and the Native District." In accordance with Fröbel's ideas, home was the model of childhood institutions, where children would learn the skills required for everyday life, such as tending flowers, cooking and cleaning, and handiwork (Axelsson & Qvarsebo 2010; Tallberg Broman 1993; Vallberg Roth 2006). The children were overseen, not by a teacher, but by a "female leader" who brought maternal care to the kindergarten (Tallberg Broman 1995; Vallberg Roth 2006). Just as the kindergarten should be like a home, the kindergarten "teachers" should be "spiritual housewives and mothers," responsible for constructing a good childhood for those in their care (Tallberg Broman 1993). Since the "traditional" women's work performed in the home was to be replicated in the kindergarten, the job of "preschool teacher" was seen as being suited to the "female nature" (Greiff 2006; Sverige 2006; Tallberg Broman 2010).

Another important person at the time of the kindergarten movement was Ellen Key, an educator, feminist, and author who exalted motherhood and longed for a society that would place motherhood at the centre of public life (Key 1909; Lundell 1984; Register 1982). Key is best known for her book, "The Century of the Child," which was published in 1900 and describes her ideas concerning education, nurturing, children, and home. Key was concerned about the decline of domestic life and increasing lack of time that children had with their parents. Key uses the word "homelessness" to describe the situation whereby children and their parents leave their home behind each day under the "increasing pressure of social pleasures and obligations" (Key 1909:192). The home is deserted and with it the pleasures of life within (ibid.).

Key's views were highly controversial, with her ideas being regarded as too radical to be implemented (Lundell 1984). Key disapproved of crèches and kindergartens and was against a women's movement that would see women being

held to masculine standards. She wanted mothers to be given economic support for raising children in order to ensure their economic independence whilst being able to dedicate their time fully to their children and the home (Key 1909). According to Register (1982), Key has come to function as a “bogeywoman,” an anti-feminist romantic who wished to confine women to motherhood. Certainly, her views are at odds with the direction Swedish society has taken as every day the home is deserted as both women and men leave for work, dropping their children off at preschool along the way.

Key’s views became increasingly controversial with the rise of the Social Democratic Party and the influence of Alva and Gunnar Myrdal within it. Together, the Myrdals wrote a book entitled, “The Population Crisis in 1936” in which they discussed their views on the future of Sweden. The Myrdals sought to create a new citizen who would be more rational and enlightened (Rothstein 2016). This rational, enlightened, and socially committed citizen was not to be found in the “feeble” woman wasting her time on housework and the raising of children, but rather in the public world outside the home (ibid.). Children, meanwhile, should be raised by “experts” in accordance with scientific methods (Etzemüller 2014; Halldén 2007; Rothstein 2016). Vallberg Roth (2006) describes early childhood education during this period as being characterised by “The Curriculum of the Welfare State.” Home-related rooms were transformed into rooms linked to society and science and there was a gradual move away from a discourse of home. The word “preschool teacher” became more frequently used to describe the role of those working in early childhood education and greater emphasis was placed on children’s independence (ibid.).

By the mid 1900s, two models of daycare existed side by side. The playschool (leksskola), which replaced the kindergarten, was a part-time institution where children aged four to seven spent three to four hours a day playing and learning together with other children, whilst the daycare (daghem) was a full-time institution for the care of children whose parents were at work. Whereas the playschool was regarded positively as it existed for the apparent need of children,

daycare was looked upon more negatively. Daycare was viewed as existing solely in order to support mothers' right to work, rather than existing for the benefit of children (Tallberg Broman 1995). This was not regarded as being a legitimate reason for their existence (ibid.). Attitudes changed, however, and the daycare centres and playschools were later combined into a preschool system that would serve the apparent interests of children whilst allowing their parents to work (Tallberg Broman 1995). These institutions eventually adopted the name "preschool" (förskola). By the end of the 1970s, 60 percent of children between the ages of three and six were enrolled in public daycare in Sweden (Kjeldstad 2001).

There has thus been an ideological shift from the belief that children are best cared for at home, or in a homelike setting, to a notion of institutions as beneficial, or even preferable, for the raising of children (Svallfors 2016). As previously mentioned, in 1996 preschools became incorporated into the education system, later receiving their own curriculum outlining specific goals to strive towards. With emphasis increasingly placed on life-long learning, the care and home content that characterised the early childcare institutions fades into the background (Carlsson & Johansson 2000; Vallberg Roth 2006). This is viewed as being particularly problematic with regard to the one- to three-year-olds whose needs, according to Carlberg et al. (2012), are largely overlooked in the preschool curriculum and its revisions (see also Kihlbom et al. 2009).

In 2012, Carlberg et al. produced an "unofficial curriculum" in reaction to the curricular directives that they regard as focussing on learning at the expense of care. Carlberg et al. argue that, where the youngest children are concerned, care must take precedence. Thus it is care that stands in focus in the unofficial curriculum, with emphasis placed on the emotional environment of the preschool, as well as physical care activities and work related to the domestic sphere of home. The result is a curriculum that is more in keeping with the dominant discourse of home that existed until the middle of the 20th century and continues to

be desired by feminists such as Martin (1995a) and Noddings (2002, 2003, 2013) who wish to see a greater valuing of female caregiving responsibilities.

2.2 Preschool Teachers' Professionalisation Project

Women have played an important role in the development of preschools in Sweden, using their gender, their “nature,” and their femininity to carve out a space in public life that would be acceptable within the culture of the time (Greiff 2006; Tallberg Broman 1995). Holmlund (1996) says that this has ultimately led to a devaluation of preschool teachers' work and achievements. The symbolism of home and motherly care that had been useful in the construction of the field of childcare has lost its symbolic value (Sverige 2006). As such, Berntsson (1999) emphasises that the most important resource preschool teachers have with regard to raising their status is pedagogical competence. Distance needs to be created between preschool and the domestic work of home if a professional identity is to be constructed (Sheridan et al. 2011).

Much of preschool teachers' work remains an intrinsic part of domestic home life, thus challenging the expectation that “the domestic” will remain separate from “the economic,” thereby maintaining the private/public dichotomy (Acker 2006; Fraser 2013; Hearn 2015). The caring role of taking responsibility for children's hygiene, protection, and emotional well-being is regarded as a simple role that can be filled by low-qualified or unqualified practitioners, or by a mother at home (Löfdahl & Folke-Fichtelius 2015). It is therefore difficult, if not impossible, to claim professionalism based on the work of care, at least according to current definitions of a profession (Brante 2014; Colnerud & Granström 2015).

An ongoing professionalisation project seeks to cement preschool teachers' position within the public realm by enabling them to monopolise credentials as experts (Enö 2011). This is done by emphasising the specialist pedagogical work carried out in preschools by teachers who have knowledge and skills gained through education in their field (Berntsson 1999, 2000; Enö 2011; Löfdahl & Folke-Fichtelius 2015). The preschool teachers' knowledge is highlighted as being

beyond the knowledge base of the layperson in the domestic sphere, thus reducing the risk of their skills being ascribed to “nature” (Sverige 2006). This monopoly of knowledge is essential for occupational closure and the acquisition of professional status (Brante 2014).

Professionalisation brings with it schoolification as the preschool distances itself from being likened to home (Berntsson 2006; Waldenström 2014). Preschool teachers bristle at the continued use of the word “daghem” in everyday speech and the media (Enö 2011; Hulshof 2016; Leone 2016; Malin N. 2011; Olofsson 2010). For many teachers, this represents a devaluation of their work and the preschool as an educational institution (Hulshof 2016). According to preschool teacher Petra Hulshof (2016), “...it is high time to consign the word “dagis” to the past, once and for all.”

2.3 Care and Domesticity in the Present Day Preschool

The voice of concern is heard from both researchers and preschool teachers who are disquieted by the apparent schoolification of preschool (Jönsson et al. 2012). A recent study by Sara Folkman (2017) investigates the act of listening within Reggio Emilia-inspired preschools. Reggio Emilia has a central place in early childhood education in Sweden, with many preschools taking inspiration from the ideology (Enö 2011; Folkman 2017). Folkman describes how the preschool teachers distance themselves from the children, who are encouraged to form attachments with each other and the environment rather than to the adults. This is regarded as being particularly problematic in relation to the youngest children who are in need of an adult to act as their secure base when their parents are not present (Broberg et al. 2012). The children, however, are expected to be independent and autonomous, seeking help from each other if assistance is required in dressing, sleeping, or the changing of nappies. Having no desire to be seen as taking on a “mother role,” the teachers de-emphasise and detach themselves from the care aspects of their work. The terms “care,” “need,” “support,” “home discourse,” and “motherhood” are viewed as having no place

within Reggio Emilia ideology and so, according to Folkman (2017), the preschools are characterised as representative of the antithesis of home (see also Dahlberg et al. 2002).

Folkman's study has reawakened debate among preschool teachers about their role in early childhood. There is concern about what children learn about human relationships when care is no longer in focus, as well as concern for what happens when women turn their back on care and a home discourse, thus reproducing and confirming the devaluation of feminine-coded² work.

Lidholt's (2000) fieldwork suggests that preschool teachers find that the meaning of their work lies in pedagogy rather than care, with many teachers reporting difficulty finding meaning in their work when they are unable to live up to the aims of the curriculum. Lidholt suggests that perhaps what is needed is a shift in perspective, with a new view as to what is of greatest importance in early childhood; from EDUcare to eduCare. At the same time, Lidholt recognises that this change in perspective is made difficult due to the various directives that emphasise the preschool's educational role. These directives are viewed positively by the Swedish teachers union (Läraryrket) as they serve the professionalisation project that seeks to challenge the low status afforded to preschool teachers (Enö 2011).

Löfgren (2016) points to narratives of care being subordinated to narratives of learning as preschool teachers tend to downplay aspects of care in their work. Löfgren interviewed preschool teachers about their experiences of documentation. Demands for increased documentation are linked to the professional aspects of accountability, with teachers being held responsible for children's learning and development (ibid.). The results show that references to care are few. When care is mentioned, it is linked to learning rather than being spoken of in its own right. Furthermore, Löfgren highlights that documentation, which is a curricular requirement, can be used as a means for preschool teachers to distance themselves

² Various traits, characteristics, tasks, occupations, and practices etcetera are culturally and ideologically coded as masculine or feminine and are valued or devalued on this basis (Hirdman 2001).

from care as they “hide themselves behind documenting learning” (Löfgren 2016:12). Much like the teachers in Folkman’s (2017) study, there is a move away from, rather than towards, the children as care stands in the way of “doing” professionalism (Löfgren 2016).

The results of Löfgren’s study echo those of Löfdahl and Folke-Fichtelius’ (2015) research on teacher professionalism and documentation. In their interviews with preschool teachers, they found that teachers prefer to focus on learning rather than care as this is viewed as affording them greater respect and status. A hierarchy is apparent between education and care, with education being regarded as a more respectable and qualified part of preschool work.

It is important to note that even if there is a shift towards a focus on pedagogy, care still remains an intrinsic part of preschool work; nappies still need changing, noses wiped, and bumps and bruises soothed. Who is going to take over responsibility for this work if preschool teachers’ professionalisation project becomes a hinder to care?

Although up to this point I have focused on preschool teachers (förskollärare), they are not the only members of preschool staff. Nursery nurses (barnskötare) also play a crucial role in early childhood. In contrast to preschool teachers, who hold a 3 ½ year undergraduate degree, nursery nurses are qualified at the upper secondary level. Various studies point to care activities being transferred to nursery nurses in order to afford preschool teachers more time to focus on children’s learning (Berntsson 2000; Enö 2011; Johansson & Pramling Samuelsson 2001; Kuisma & Sandberg 2008; Löfdahl & Folk-Finctelius 2015). Status is not to be found on the preschool floor alongside the children, where nursery nurses spend much of their time. This has become increasingly evident with the introduction of first-teachers (förste-förskollärare) who spend less time with the children and are instead responsible for overseeing and supporting preschool staff in their daily pedagogical work (Regeringskansliet 2015). With this position comes an increase in salary and higher status within the preschool, benefits based on pedagogical competence and work centred around activities of

an educational nature (Regeringskansliet 2015; Richter 2014; Stendhal 2016). No reward is said to exist for the practitioner³ who is especially caring, loving, and emotionally attentive.

There are usually two sides to every story and this story is no different. Therefore, I must mention that there are other voices that do not view care as having a neglected position in the preschool, as well as preschool teachers who do not underestimate the value of care in their work. Johansson and Pramling Samuelsson (2001) reflect on the relationship between learning and care during preschool mealtimes. They see care as taking precedence over pedagogy in relation to the youngest children, leading to an apparent dichotomy between these two aspects of early childhood. At the same time, a hierarchy is in existence, which historically positions feminine-coded care as being of less worth than masculine-coded pedagogy. Care alone is therefore a problematic position from which to claim professional status. As such, Johansson and Pramling Samuelsson wish to see a clearer interweaving of care and pedagogy in accordance with the notion of *educare*. In line with Löfgren (2016), however, I argue that an increased focus on the interweaving of care and pedagogy will do nothing to afford care the status it deserves in its own right.

In Jonsdottir and Paggetti's (2016) interview study with preschool teachers about the role of care in early years, the importance of care and a feeling of security is emphasised by all. At the same time, one of the teachers expresses frustration over the fact that planned activities often constitute an obstacle to giving children the care they need. The same teacher emphasises that care must be prioritised for the youngest children, which the other teachers are in agreement with. The results of the study show that the preschool teachers regard their primary focus as being children's security and well-being, with learning and development of skills coming in second place. At the same time, the physical

³ The word "practitioner" will be used when I am referring to both nursery nurses and preschool teachers.

aspects of care, such as seeing to hunger needs or putting a plaster on a cut, are seldom mentioned.

The findings from Persson and Tallberg Broman's (2002) interviews and surveys with preschool and primary school teachers, as well as students of early childhood education, support the results from Jonsdottir and Paggetti's research. Security, combined with care and well-being are viewed as being of primary importance in the preschool despite curricular directives emphasising learning and education. Care and well-being are even regarded as being a priority for preschool teaching as a profession. The consequence of this is that preschool teachers find themselves caught in a dilemma due to conflicting priorities caused by the gap between national goals and local realities (Persson & Tallberg Broman 2002, 2018).

3. Theoretical Framework

In this section I present the main concepts and theories underlying the current study. I begin by taking a closer look at Martin's concept of a Schoolhome, before moving on to considerations of how to define care. Central to these considerations is Noddings' feminine ethic of care, which is viewed as a lens through which to understand the relational aspects of caring for young children. Furthermore, I discuss Noddings' and Martin's ideas behind a pedagogy of care, which aims to make care a central tenet of school life. I conclude with an examination of the concept of a profession, whilst also paying attention to the gendered aspects of professions and professionalisation.

3.1 Defining the Schoolhome

Feminist philosopher of education Jane Roland Martin (1995a) believes that children are missing out on many of the essentials required for being successful and fulfilled members of society. As the home is deserted each morning, Martin worries that a void is left in children's lives, one that is not being filled by schools with their emphasis on academics and preparation for life beyond the private sphere:

One finds repeated demands for proficiency in the three Rs, for clear, logical thinking, and for higher standards of achievement in science, mathematics, history, literature, and the like. One searches in vain for discussions of love or calls for mastery of the three Cs of care, concern, and connection (Martin 1995a:122).

Martin writes within the context of the US education system and yet her words ring true even in Sweden where any notion of domesticity as a prerequisite for civic responsibility is absent from curricular demands. What is left is what Martin (1995a:75) describes as a "hidden curriculum in anti-domesticity," a curriculum that confirms and reinforces society's devaluation of the private sphere and women's work, which are viewed as incapable of providing occasions for "intellectual nourishment" (ibid.).

Martin has a solution to this “domestic vacuum” in her vision of a Schoolhome, which includes a “back to basics” domestic curriculum taught in an affectionate climate. The Schoolhome is inspired by Italian educator Maria Montessori’s *Casa dei Bambini* of the 1930s. Montessori became a significant figure in early childhood education after graduating as Italy’s first female doctor. Montessori used her experience and observations from her work with disadvantaged children to develop a unique philosophy of education that emphasises freedom, independence, and respect for the child under the guidance of a teacher, the directress. According to Montessori (2007), this teacher is to embody the image of a beautiful and loving mother figure, whilst taking care of the preschool environment as a wife takes care of the home. Already here it is possible to see a link between Montessori education and the home, which was for Montessori (ibid.) the ideal place for young children. Montessori believed that children under the age of three were best cared for at home with their mothers, not in preschools (Skjöld Wennerström & Bröderman Smeds 2008).

The name of Montessori’s first school, *Casa dei bambini*, is often translated into English as “The Children’s House.” Martin says that this is a mistranslation, as what Montessori was really describing was not a house, but a home. In the “Children’s Home,” children in mixed age-groups work freely and at their own pace in an environment that is designed for them. This environment is divided into separate areas, one for each area of the Montessori curriculum. One of the foundational areas is “practical life,” which contains the equipment needed for “the management of the miniature family” (Montessori 2008:12). The exercises of practical life involve the everyday activities that adults engage in at home, for example, setting and clearing the table, preparing food, cleaning, tidying, and tending plants (Lillard & Jessen 2003; Montessori 2008). Additionally, the child learns self-care, such as washing hands and dressing. These practical life activities form the inspiration for Martin’s domestic curriculum (Martin 1995a).

Of course, the Schoolhome cannot and should not take on all the functions of the home. The hope is the creation of a society that is less resistant to the

reproductive work involved in the private sphere. The goal is not to simply outsource this work to others, thus “liberating” women from domestic work, a trend that is visible in Swedish society (Calleman 2011; Carlsson & Johansson 2000; Sverige 2008). The idea with the Schoolhome is that both girls and boys will learn to value care and domesticity, which Martin (1995a:155) claims is impossible in our culture’s “domophobia” with its “devaluation of and morbid anxiety about things domestic.”

Martin’s vision of home is undoubtedly idealistic in that what it is creating is an image of how the home *should* be, not necessarily how it actually is. Nevertheless, I would argue that ideals are important in that they play a critical role in imagining future change and alternative ways of organising society. As Martin (1995a:182) says, “There is an enormous gap between ideal and reality, but this does not invalidate the project of reclamation.” Indeed, I would find it difficult to argue against a positive moral system where care, concern, and connection form the centrepiece.

Martin provides no recipe to follow in creating a Schoolhome. In fact, she emphasises that there is no single form that a Schoolhome must take. What we do learn from her writing is that domesticity and the three Cs should be central. The Schoolhome pushes against the tide that sees productive work in the public sphere as the end goal for education. Martin seeks to reinstate the status of home, putting higher value on women’s work and reclaiming the importance of home for all.

3.2 Defining Care

Whilst the practical side of the domestic curriculum is concrete and easily observable, the three Cs may be somewhat more abstract if an effort is not made to define what constitutes care, concern, and connection. As Goldstein and Lake (2000) point out, assuming that teachers know care when they see it leaves too much to chance.

The label that Goldstein (1994.:11) chooses to hang upon Martin’s “highly complex and subtle web of words and emotions” is “love.” Whilst many

researchers are sceptical towards viewing teachers as acting as parents (Dahlberg et al. 2002; James 2010; Zhang 2007), Goldstein has no problem comparing a teacher's love to parental love, which Martin (1995b:357) herself does when she writes that children's learning in the classroom should be guided by "a spirit of family-like affection." Goldstein (1998) sees many overlaps between teaching and mothering, although she warns against seeing teachers as mother substitutes, which could result in rivalry. Instead, what Goldstein wishes us to take from this notion of parental love is the knowledge that teachers, like parents, are involved in a mutually caring relationship with those they are responsible for. Teachers should not be expected to maintain a "detached concern," but rather "love" and its subjective, emotional, and interpersonal characteristics should be given educational authority and placed on equal footing with other sources of knowledge (ibid.).

Noddings (2001:32) emphasises that "most human beings... want care from people who love them, not from paid strangers." At the same time, preschool teachers may be wary of being exploited if their work is framed in terms of a labour of love (Acker 2006; Goldstein 1994; James 2010; Zhang 2007). I would argue, however, in line with teacher Neil Rasmussen (2012) who claims that "you can't teach a child you don't love." Substitute the word love for care and it becomes apparent how this may indeed be the case. How can you teach a child you don't care about? How can you *care for* a child you don't care about? As Urie Bronfenbrenner (1978:774) says, "In order to develop, a child needs the enduring, irrational involvement of one or more adults in care and joint activity with the child... Somebody has to be crazy about that kid."

Like Goldstein, care-focused feminist Nel Noddings also argues for institutional care to be modelled on the family. Noddings (2002, 2003, 2013) views the home as the primary educator of children; the place where children learn both what it means to be cared for and what it means to care. Just like a mother, a teacher enters into a special caring relation with the children s/he is responsible for (Noddings 2013). Responsibility is, however, not simply a matter

of accountability, whereby needs are answered for a prescribed result (Noddings *ibid.*). According to Noddings (2013:122), “What is aimed at is not duty – not accountability – but the renewed possibility of taking pleasure in caring and in each other.”

Noddings frequently draws on Martin’s work when discussing care and her vision of care-centred education. Furthermore, like Martin, Noddings (2002) too desires to see a societal cherishing of domestic life. Due to the similarities between Noddings’ and Martin’s visions of a care-centred education, as well as Noddings’ substantial work on discussions of care, I shall now turn to discuss Noddings’ notion of care in more detail.

3.2.1 Feminine Ethic of Care

Noddings (1995, 2013) emphasises that caring occurs within relationships. In the preschool, this relationship consists of the teacher, the “one-caring,” and the child, the “cared-for” (*ibid.*). Several characteristics need to be present in order to establish a successful ethic of care relationship. The one-caring must be engrossed in the child, committed to her/him, and experience a motivational displacement such that responding to the needs of the child takes precedence (Noddings 2002, 2013). The child, in turn, must then recognise, receive, and be responsive to the teacher’s caring acts (*ibid.*). According to Noddings (2002), it is this reception of the teacher’s caring that completes the relationship.

Taking a closer look at the characteristics of an ethic of care as described by Noddings, I believe it is possible to see links with Martin’s three Cs. The first characteristic pertains to attention, or as Noddings (2013) says, “engrossment.” The one-caring teacher becomes engrossed in the child, listening to her/him and accepting her/his feelings and experiences without evaluation or assessment. The teacher, in turn, feels pleasure or pain according to what is recounted (*ibid.*). The child has the teacher’s full attention meaning that the teacher is fully “present” in her/his acts of caring, even in physical absence (Noddings 2013). This attention

can be further described as “receptive attention” in that an essential characteristic of the caring encounter is that the cared-for responds to the caring act (ibid.).

The second characteristic of an ethic of care relationship is commitment. The one-caring feels compelled to act on behalf of another and makes a commitment to act (Noddings 2013). The intention to act is not enough, but rather a feeling of commitment and responsibility motivates a shift from intention to action. As Noddings (ibid.) points out, a sustained feeling of a need to act, along with a renewal of commitment, must be in place for a caring relationship to be achieved.

The final characteristic is motivational displacement, which involves giving primacy to the needs of the cared-for. According to Noddings (2013:24), “Caring involves stepping out of one’s own personal frame of reference into the other’s.” The world becomes viewed through the eyes of the cared-for and the one-caring’s reasons for acting are in accordance with the problematic situations within that worldview.

Within Noddings’ description of care, it is possible to discern the elements of care, concern, and connection. There is connection in terms of the relationship between the one-caring and the cared-for, as without attention, engrossment, presence and reciprocity there can be no care. Likewise, no care exists if there is no concern for the other. Thus Noddings’ definition of care provides a useful starting point for determining whether or not care is observed in practice.

Noddings (1995, 2013) describes her ethic of care as a “feminine” ethic derived from female experience and the tasks and values long associated with women. At the same time, Noddings emphasises that this does not mean that men are excluded from an ethic of care. Both women and men engage in caring relationships, although it has undoubtedly been women who have taken, and continue to take on, the largest responsibility for care. By attributing the word “feminine” to care, Noddings seeks to ensure that women’s history is not discounted. Noddings (1995:225) argues that “centuries of experience have left their mark on women’s ways of thinking and on the value they espouse.” As such, to care may be seen as an important part of female identity. Not only that, but

biology too has a part to play in women's close connection to care. Women experience both the physical and emotional aspects of care as they carry and bring children into the world. This care of a mother for a child is termed "natural caring" and is, according to Noddings (1995), that which comes before and is preferable to ethical caring. Whereas ethical caring must be summoned, natural caring occurs through a feeling of wanting to care rather than a sense of "oughtness" (Noddings *ibid.*:232). Ethical caring is therefore viewed as a reflective extension of natural caring and the relationship between mother and child⁴.

3.2.2 A Feminist Pedagogy of Care

Both Martin (1995a) and Noddings (1990, 1995) wish to see schools infused with a pedagogy of care. According to Fickel et al. (2017:49), "The aim of a pedagogy of care is to nurture young people's abilities to care and live together." In focus is the nurturing of the caring ethical ideal (Noddings 2013).

Just as Noddings' ethic of care is described as a "feminine" or "feminist" ethic⁵, I have chosen to also apply the word "feminist" to the pedagogy of care as this is a pedagogy that has its roots in the experiences and lives of women. This pedagogy sees a revaluing of the reproductive work performed in and associated with the private sphere of home (Acker 2006; Hartmann 1979; Rothman 2000). No longer is there a desire to be "liberated" from women's work, but rather there is acknowledgement of the importance of the domestic and care for both women and men (Noddings 2002). A pedagogy of care teaches what it means to care for people, animals, plants, objects, and places in the hope that even the public sphere will become more care-centred, with both women and men "infusing the public world with a domestic spirit and atmosphere" (Martin 1995a:183).

4 Although Noddings uses the mother-child relationship as the most typical and recognisable model for natural caring, it should be emphasised that this does not exclude men from natural caring. Fathers and men also have the ability to take part in the spontaneous natural caring that arises out of love (Noddings 1995, 2013).

5 It should be noted that Noddings' ethic of care has also been criticised by feminist scholars who question the wisdom of closely linking women with care and even express concern over possible inequalities in the caring relationship (see Hoagland 1991; Tong 2009).

3.3 Defining a Profession

There is no consensus on what constitutes a profession, although there are a number of characteristics which are frequently emphasised in the various attempts to provide a working definition (Brante 2011, 2013). These characteristics include specialised theoretical knowledge through long, formal academic training, a high degree of autonomy, a degree of discretion, a defined code of ethics, and a monopoly over both knowledge and practice (Brante 2011, 2013, 2014; Colnerud & Granström 2015). Brante (2013) emphasises that professions are knowledge-based and it is this monopoly over a specialised field of knowledge that leads to occupational closure. Strict regulations ensure that only those who possess the required knowledge, skills, and licence to enter the profession may do so (Brante 2013; Colnerud & Granström 2015).

Greiff (2006) distinguishes between professions and callings (vocations), with preschool work being defined as the latter. In contrast to professions, where material rewards are often the primary driving force, those working in callings are more often driven by the feeling of purpose that comes from helping others (*ibid.*). The work itself is said to be the reward, providing a justification for the lower salaries associated with callings (*ibid.*). According to Greiff (2006), vocational culture is gendered in nature, dominating areas of work where women are in the majority. The needs of others are less in focus in the professions, which have long been associated with a construction of masculinity. There is thus a dichotomy between callings and professions, as well as a hierarchy, with professions representing a valuing of the masculine over the feminine (*ibid.*).

Physicians, engineers, architects, scientists, and lawyers are often regarded as the “prototype” of what a profession is due to the long university training required to gain access to the field and the high status associated with the work (Brante 2013). On the other hand, Brante (2013, 2014) regards teachers as being part of a new generation of professions known as “semi-professions,” “new professions,” or “professions of the welfare state.” These “semi-professions” are dominated by women and are characterised by, for example, shorter education programs, less

autonomy than classic professions, a less specialised body of knowledge, and a tendency to be professionalised from above through political decisions (Brante 2014). Brante (2013) points out that semi-professions have been less successful, or even less interested, in “closing” their jurisdictions. Securing control over a professional jurisdiction is one of the defining characteristics of a profession, however, preschools continue to employ staff who have no education in working with children (Persson & Tallberg Broman 2018; Skolverket 2017). Additionally, the extent to which preschool teachers have monopoly over a specific body of knowledge can be questioned due to the fact that much of the work done in preschools has similarities to the work done in the domestic sphere (Tallberg Broman 1995). As Berntsson (1999) points out, if preschool’s most important job is to take over the care of children while their parents are working, then the preschool teacher’s knowledge and competence can be viewed as that which every parent has. According to Berntsson (2000), this has led to a “fight” for pedagogical responsibility as a means of closure. The risk is, however, that early years becomes professionalised through emphasis on pedagogical knowledge at the cost of care, resulting in “the hierarchizing of the professional over the caregiver” (Sisson & Iverson 2014:226).

3.3.1 Gendered Aspects of Professionalism

Professions have their roots firmly established in the traditionally male-dominated public sphere (Acker 2006). The feminine-coded private sphere, along with the work carried out within it, is, on the other hand, the antithesis of professionalism (Enö 2011). As previously mentioned, much of the work performed within preschools is intimately connected with the reproductive work carried out in the home (Acker 2006; Berntsson 2000; Fraser 2013; Sisson & Iverson 2014). This work is devalued by a society that places more value on “men’s work” and seeks to uphold the distinction between the private and public realms whilst continuing to view care as “light” female work done for love (Acker 2006).

Crispin (2017) is concerned by women's attempts to carve out a space for themselves within the masculine realm, leading to a partial abandonment of the feminine spheres of home, care, and community. These concerns are echoed by Hearn (1982) in his discussion of the semi-professions and what he refers to as the "patriarchal socialisation" of emotionality. As the reproductive work formerly controlled by women enters the public sphere, it moves towards being controlled by men and subject to the expertise of experts. Thus, the semi-professions become more like the full professions, with professionalisation being a patriarchal process through which reproductive work becomes controlled by men and masculine ways of thinking and working (ibid.), that is, if a viable alternative version of professionalism fails to be established (Apeso-Varano 2007; Osgood 2006).

According to Noddings (1990), professionalisation ignores women's experiences whilst leaning towards stereotypical masculine notions of what constitutes professionalism. Professionalism demands a sharp separation between the public and private spheres, between the work of teachers and homemakers, and yet for many women the lines between these two areas are blurred (Noddings 1990; Sisson & Iverson 2014). As such, Noddings (ibid.) calls for a movement towards *deprofessionalisation*. This does not mean a reduction in attention to quality or a loss of pride in the work performed in the preschool. Rather, *deprofessionalisation* means:

...an attempt to eliminate the special language that separates us from other educators in the community (especially parents), a reduction in the narrow specialization that carries with it reduced contact with individual children, and an increase in the spirit of caring... (Noddings 2013:197).

With these words, Noddings echoes the beliefs of the female pioneers of the Swedish preschool, such as Ellen Key, in its founding days. According to Noddings (2013:200), "it is time for the voice of the mother to be heard in education." It is time to question masculine notions of professionalism and open the door to a feminine approach to education.

4. Methods

This section charts the methodological background to the study, justifying the rationale for the selected research strategies and explaining the qualitative data collection methods employed. Furthermore, ethical considerations are addressed before concluding with a discussion of the limitations of the study.

4.1 Making a Case for Case Study Methodology

Case study methodology is a comprehensive examination of a particular case, or set of cases, in order to explore a phenomenon within its particular context (Cousin 2005; Gerring 2004; Yin 2009). It is a research approach that assists in understanding phenomena in real-life situations, embracing both contextual uniqueness and the uniqueness of human experience (Gerring 2004; Simons 1996; Yin 2009). Yin (2009) points out that case study methodology is particularly appropriate to research questions pertaining to the “how and why” of a social phenomena, as is the case in this current study. Such questions lend themselves to an open, exploratory research approach, which is characteristic of case studies (*ibid.*). A case study approach may also be considered when the researcher is not required to, and cannot, manipulate the behaviour of those involved in the study and when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are blurred. These conditions are applicable to this research as the situated nature of the collected data means that the case cannot be considered or understood without the context.

4.1.1 A Single-Case Study Approach

Multiple case study design allows for cross-case analysis, whilst the single case study concerns itself with the uniqueness of one particular setting (Bryman 2016; Stake 1995; Yin 2009). Yin (2009) is cautious in his recommendations towards the single-case case study, although he does recognise that there are rationales for performing a single case study, such as when a single case represents the “critical case” (see also Flyvbjerg 2006), as may apply to the case in this study.

Flyvbjerg (2006) uses the example of the “critical case” to exhibit how generalisations can be made from the single case using, for example, Popper’s test

of falsification (Popper 1970). If a hypothesis or scientific proposition proves to be inconsistent with even just one observation then it must be either revised or rejected (Flyvbjerg 2006; Popper 1970). In this way, the “critical case” can lead to further investigations and theory-building (Flyvbjerg 2006).

Whilst Flyvbjerg (2006) criticises the belief that case studies do not allow for generalisations, Stake (1995) argues that case studies do not need to make any claims about the generalisability of their findings as what is important is that the unique features of the particular case are captured. According to Stake (ibid.:4), “We do not study a case primarily to understand other cases. Our first obligation is to understand this one case.”

4.1.2 Creating an Analytical Frame

Case study methodology includes theory development as an essential part of the design phase (Yin 2009). Literature and theory assist in establishing a rationale for the research as well as helping to determine research questions and identify methods of data collection and strategies for analysing the resulting data (Baxter & Jack 2008; Yin 2009). It was upon reading Martin’s book, *The Schoolhome: Rethinking Schools for Changing Families* (1995a), and seeing how the arguments within fed into the debates and discussions surrounding the place of care and home in Swedish preschools that the focus for this research was solidified. Google Scholar was then used as the primary database for searching for articles containing words such as, “home discourse,” “care,” “ethics of care,” and “domesticity.” Reference lists from these articles assisted in finding additional literature pertaining to the study.

Whilst a conceptual framework has existed from the beginning, it is important to note that it has not been set in stone. The framework developed as the study progressed so as to safeguard against becoming driven by preconceptions, thereby overlooking what the data was actually trying to say (Baxter & Jack 2008).

4.2 Bounding the Case

Establishing clear-cut boundaries ensures that the research study remains manageable and consistent with its goals (Baxter & Jack 2008; Miles & Huberman 1994). This case study is bounded by both time and place (Creswell 2009). Data collection occurred during a one-week period in February 2019 in the toddler department (småbarnsavdelningen) of a Swedish Montessori preschool. This preschool department provided the real-life context within which to explore and understand care and domesticity.

As the aim is to explore the potential for the existence of a Schoolhome within the current context of early years education in Sweden, it was essential to make strategic choices in order to maximize the chance of finding a setting that could be likened to Martin's Schoolhome (Stake 1995). As the Schoolhome is based on Montessori's *Casa dei bambini*, I decided that a Montessori preschool would be one of the prerequisites for inclusion in the study.

My initial plan was to conduct the study in two locations, thereby increasing my chances of finding a "Schoolhome-like" setting. I contacted ten preschools in my locality, including a preschool that I had had prior contact with. Contact was initiated via an email outlining the research study and the data collection process. I received four replies; one from the preschool that ended up being the research site, one from the preschool where I had previously conducted research, and two from preschools who declined participation due to staffing issues and problems within the child groups. Similar reasons were given for the second research site, the preschool I had previously visited, later withdrawing their participation.

4.2.1 The Setting

Little Roots⁶ is an independent Montessori preschool run as a staff cooperative. Whilst the work of the preschool is based on Montessori pedagogy, the national curriculum remains the official document stating the objectives of the preschool. The preschool is centrally situated in a small Swedish city and consists of two

⁶ All names are pseudonyms.

departments, one for the three- to six-year-olds and another for the under-threes. This study focuses on the toddler department, the under-threes, as it is the needs of these children that are regarded as being most overlooked by the curriculum (Carlberg et al. 2012; Kihlbom et al. 2009).

In total, 26 children attend Little Roots, of which eight are placed in the toddler department. Working with these eight children are two full-time members of staff; a preschool teacher (Freja) and a nursery nurse (Barbara). The size of the department is well within the National Agency for Education's guidelines, which recommend a group size of 6-12 children for the toddler department (Skolverket 2018b). Additionally, eight children is well below the average group size in toddler departments in Swedish preschools, which in 2017 was 12.4 children per group (ibid.).

In summary, there are a number of ways that Little Roots may be viewed as the "strategic choice of case," that is, the "favourable case" for finding a "Schoolhome-like" setting (Flyvbjerg 2006:9):

1. It uses a Montessori approach. Montessori emphasised the importance of the home for young children as well as including practical life activities in her pedagogical system.
2. It is a small preschool with a low child-to-adult ratio, potentially allowing for greater stability and closeness in terms of relationships.
3. It is a staff cooperative, which gives the practitioners a greater say in decision making.

4.3 Data Collection

The use of multiple data sources is a hallmark of case studies (Baxter & Jack 2008). Researchers integrate several sources of data in order to provide a more comprehensive picture and greater holistic understanding of the studied phenomena (ibid.). Additionally, multiple data sources can help increase data credibility, strengthening positions and claims as the phenomena is explored from a variety of perspectives (Baxter & Jack 2008; Yin 2009). The choice of data

collection methods remains at the discretion of the researcher, being selected in accordance with their appropriateness to the task of understanding the phenomenon under investigation (ibid.).

4.3.1 Observations

Observations of practice occurred within the everyday routines of the preschool. The aim of these observations was to identify and record care and domestic events occurring in their real-world context. I spent one continuous week observing the interactions between the practitioners and the children, with the shortest observational period being 3 hours long and the longest 7.5 hours. Observations were predominantly conducted between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 12 p.m., but one day was also spent observing in the afternoon.

At the onset of the study, I created two observational protocols that I intended to use as a guide for focusing the observations. A list of potential “care events” included, for example, “injury,” “conflict,” “hygiene,” and “feeding.” One event was named “other” in order to leave room for situations that I had not considered. The protocol was created in conjunction with the literature review, whereby I identified the aspects of care that are commonly discussed regarding preschool practice. Furthermore, I drew from my own personal experience of working with young children in identifying care events. A similar protocol was created for “domestic events,” resulting in a list that included, for example, “tidying,” “cleaning,” “setting and clearing the table,” and “food preparation.” Once again, I drew from both personal experience and previous literature in forming the protocol. Additionally, various lists of suggestions for Montessori practical life activities for toddlers were of assistance in creating a list of potential domestic events that could be observed (Davies 2019; Lillard & Jessen 2003; The Montessori Notebook n.d.).

Whilst the protocols were useful as a starting point for thinking about the observable aspects of care and domesticity in the preschool, I found them restrictive when actually documenting the observations. Thus, after the first day, I

decided to simply write fieldnotes, free from the structured layout of the protocols. These fieldnotes recorded interactions between the children and practitioners, conversations, activities, and everyday routines. Fieldnotes were made during each visit and then typed up immediately afterwards. Furthermore, I kept a fieldwork diary, which assisted in processing experiences and enabling self-reflection (O'Reilly 2009).

Throughout the observations, I adopted a position of partial participation, attempting to find a balance between observation and participation (O'Reilly 2009). This balance was dependent upon addressing the tension between the requirements of the research and the requirements of those being researched (ibid.).

4.3.2 Interviews

Semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with both practitioners. These interviews were limited in time due to the fact that there are only two practitioners working in the department. Taking this into account, I scheduled 30 minutes for each interview, although the actual time was closer to 40 minutes. The interviews took place at the end of the week in order to allow for discussions about events that had occurred during my observations.

The interviews were semi-structured, following an interview guide containing questions related to four areas of interest, that is, general questions concerning the practitioners' motivations for working with children, as well as questions related to care, home, and professionalism (see Appendix A). Additional questions were posed in accordance with the interviewee's answers or issues that arose during the interviews. The interviews were recorded using a mobile phone and were transcribed verbatim.

Alongside the more "formal" interviews, I was engaged in a continuous dialogue with the practitioners. These dialogues were unstructured, formless, and open-ended, resembling a private conversation (Babbie 2013; Brewer 2000; O'Reilly 2009). Sometimes the dialogues were initiated by myself, whilst at other

times they were initiated by the practitioners. These conversations were particularly useful for understanding the active and ongoing everyday thought processes involved in preschool practice, as well as for building a relationship with the research participants (O'Reilly 2009). Discussions centred around events that were happening, or had just happened, with the practitioners reflecting on their decisions in the moment. Fieldnotes were written immediately after each conversation.

4.3.3 Documents

Two documents were provided by the preschool teacher. These documents are specific to the toddler department and are given to parents when their child is accepted to the preschool. The first document consists of two pages. The first page is a welcome letter to the parents, explaining how the three-week schooling-in period works, whilst the second page is a form about the child, which the parents are to complete. This form poses questions about family, food, rest, toilet practices, likes, fears, and preferences regarding being comforted.

The second document is a short booklet called, "The Child in the Centre," which is written by the preschool teacher. This booklet focuses on the specific needs of the toddler and how the department aims to meet those needs. The two documents provide additional insight into the practitioners' thoughts regarding care and domesticity in the preschool, as well as shedding light on why certain routines and practices are in place.

4.4 Data Analysis

Analysis has been an ongoing process throughout this study as I engaged in typing up fieldnotes after each day's observations and transcribing interviews. These moments provided the opportunity to begin the process of making sense of the data, looking for the "emergence of meaning" (Cousin 2005:425). The initial analysis was inspired by grounded theory, using open coding to identify emerging themes and patterns (Glaser & Strauss 1967). This approach was important in ensuring that the analysis stayed close to the data, avoiding any attempt to distort

the data in order to fit a preconceived analytical framework. Thus the analysis tended towards an inductive approach whereby theory is allowed to emerge from the data (Blommaert & Jie 2010; O'Reilly 2009). That being said, it may be more correct to use O'Reilly's term "iterative-inductive" (2005, 2009) as it is misleading to imply that the analytical framework had no influence on naming and defining the final themes. The final themes have emerged through an analysis process involving a back and forth between data, research literature, and the theoretical framework.

Each data source in this study has been treated as part of a whole, with themes arising with the various sources in dialogue with each other (Baxter & Jack 2008). Observations were triangulated with the interviews and documents to look for convergence and divergence among the sources (Cousin 2005; Patton 2002). Mind mapping was useful for seeing how the themes weaved together, producing the final picture of analysis. The themes that emerged from this process form the framework for the results.

Although I have stayed as close to the data as possible, I must recognise my own role in the production and interpretation of the findings. Without my presence the data would not have been produced and the analysis never made. Case study is an interpretive form of research that acknowledges the subjective, but strategies such as triangulation and reflexivity assist in avoiding "narrative fraud" (Cousin 2005). Additionally, my analysis relies on "thick description" of the case, allowing readers to share in the interpretation of the data (ibid.).

4.5 Ethical Considerations

The research follows the ethical standards as set forth by the Swedish Research Council (Hermerén 2011). Throughout the project it has been imperative to ensure that issues regarding consent, confidentiality, and anonymity have been addressed. The informed consent was obtained from all research participants. Written information regarding the nature and purpose of the study, as well as the research methods, was provided to the preschool staff, and a letter covering the same

information was distributed to the children's parents prior to my first day of data collection. Furthermore, assurances of confidentiality and anonymity were made in writing along with emphasising that participation in the study was voluntary and could be terminated at any time without need for explanation.

As regards confidentiality, initials alone have been used in all fieldnotes and any other material that has been collected in connection with the study. Pseudonyms were used when transcribing the interviews and have continued to be used throughout the analysis and writing process. All data, including audio recordings of the interviews, are stored securely in a password-protected computer in order to ensure that I alone have access.

O'Reilly (2009) emphasises that the researcher has a responsibility to those being studied. Whilst I had spent time considering the overarching ethics of the study, there were also moments that required spontaneous decision-making related to research ethics. This involved the need to be reflexive about research practice, which according to Guillemin and Gillam (2004:276) means:

...first, an acknowledgement of microethics, that is, of the ethical dimensions of ordinary, everyday research practice; second, sensitivity to what we call the "ethically important moments" in research practice, in all their particularities; and third, having or being able to develop a means of responding to ethical concerns if and when they arise in the research...

An example of an "ethically important moment" in this study was when I heard a child in the hall getting distressed when his father was about to leave. From a research perspective it would have been interesting to go to the hall and watch the interactions occurring between the adults and the child, but I refrained from doing so as it would have been disrespectful to the child and the adults trying to comfort him. Similarly, when a child came to me for help or sat down on my knee with a book s/he wanted me to read, I set my work aside and responded to the child. To not do so would have been both disrespectful to the child as well as contrary to my own ethic of care.

4.6 Limitations

Although I have already made a case for a single-case study, I acknowledge that there are analytic benefits from multiple-case designs, especially if there is a desire to generalise beyond the single case considered (Yin 2009). At the same time, the single case does allow for modifications of current generalisations and permits an in-depth investigation of the studied phenomena. Indeed, I feel that the inclusion of additional cases would have led to less specific and detailed results. As Stake (1995:8) emphasises, “The real business of case study is particularization, not generalization.”

A second limitation concerns the interviews and observations. The fact that both are shaped by the researcher must not be overlooked (Blommaert & Jie 2010). In interviewing, it was I who determined the questions, even if the semi-structured approach allowed some scope to alter the direction of the interview. Furthermore, interviewees may be influenced by the authoritative position of the interviewer (*ibid.*). Thus, the interview must be viewed as a co-construction, with every statement reflecting my own presence in the research (*ibid.*).

Observations are similarly shaped by the researcher who decides what is of importance to observe. Additionally, there is always an “observer’s effect” (Blommaert & Jie 2010:27), making it impossible for me to observe an event as if I was not there (see also Yin 2009). As mentioned, there were also events that I refrained from observing out of respect for the research participants. Even if my primary goal at the preschool was the collection of data, my primary duty was to ensure that the research process caused no harm or discomfort.

5. Results and Analysis

Six themes emerged from the analysis, revealing six features of early years practice at Little Roots preschool: 1) Practice as a call to care 2) Practice as an extension of home 3) Practice as domestic work 4) Practice as relationship and connection 5) Practice as distinctive for the youngest children, and 6) Practice as physical and emotional care. It should be noted that these themes are not mutually exclusive and so there is a degree of overlap between them. Indeed, the themes should be understood from a relational perspective as the existence of one of these features of practice can be viewed as influencing the existence of the others.

5.1 Practice as a Call to Care

Freja and Barbara speak of their work in terms of a “calling” (Brante 2009; Greiff 2006; Tallberg Broman 1995). Freja says that she knew from around the age of twelve that she wanted to work with children, after working as a babysitter. That which drew her to this line of work was care:

In the beginning, it was absolutely care. That you took care of someone. That they would be well-off. So I believe that was the first part. And then I’ve always really liked being with children. It was probably that which attracted me first (Freja).

In contrast to Freja, it was later in life that Barbara knew that she wanted to work with children, after getting a position as a substitute teacher helping children from Poland with their language learning in a Swedish school:

I got a long-term substitute position and realised I loved it. I have always liked children, but I didn’t know it was possible to work as a substitute or in preschool without education so I started in this way. And then while I worked as a substitute I trained to become a nursery nurse (Barbara).

It was through direct contact with children that Freja and Barbara made the decision to work in early years. The work that they did with children during this early contact was performed without training or “professional” qualifications, but rather they learned in relationship with those they were responsible for. Already here it is possible to discern a departure from notions of professionalism regarding teaching. Although it was Barbara’s knowledge of Polish that allowed her

entrance into work in the education system, this knowledge was based on the fact that Polish is her native language rather than being knowledge gained through qualifications or specialist training. Neither Barbara nor Freja had any specialised pedagogical knowledge for working with children in the beginning and so the first roots of their knowledge are found in practical experience rather than theory or abstraction (see Brante 2009).

Freja and Barbara speak of the importance of care, not only in terms of their work, but also in terms of their personal connection to this area of life. The preschool is a place where they can practice a central, defining aspect of their being. This appears to particularly be the case when working with the youngest children:

I'm taken with the youngest... The care that you speak about, I have it in me, I believe. I have the feeling that I can handle the schooling-in period in a good way and that I am a warm person and I can find a way to make it good for the youngest to start and gradually feel secure (Barbara).

Barbara believes that she has always been a caring person who children seem to like to be around. She believes that care is something within her that she was born with and then had nurtured in her own family upbringing. I asked if it is possible to learn to be caring or if you have to be born with that characteristic, to which she replied:

Both. I believe at preschool you learn all the time as you are always meeting new people and you can say it's a constant learning... So yes, you learn a little. But I believe that you have certain characteristics. Yes. Facial expressions, body language can perhaps be learned. I don't know. There are a lot of things you get early on, perhaps from parents. Genetics. Or experiences from childhood, or throughout your life. These things play a role (Barbara).

Barbara mentioned several times that she is a warm person, a characteristic she views as important in her work with children. She associates being warm with helping the children feel safe and secure in her presence so that their time in preschool is enjoyed in close relation with those responsible for taking care of them. At no point was being theoretically competent or knowledgeable, that which is central to preschool teachers' professionalisation project (Berntsson 1999, 2000;

Enö 2011; Löfdahl & Folke-Fichtelius 2015), mentioned as being important characteristics for practitioners. Rather, it was emotional characteristics that were continually emphasised as being essential in working with children; warmth, lovingness, sensitivity, patience, affection, and a caring nature. That is not to say that teaching and learning were never mentioned as being a part of preschool work, but rather that the defining characteristics of a preschool teacher, according to Barbara and Freja, do not lie in pedagogical competence. When Barbara did refer to teaching and learning she focused on the ability of the practitioner to be open and curious about the world, willing to discover the interesting in the ordinary. Once again, these are characteristics that Barbara refers to as being part of a person's character rather than something learned. She mentions the fact that this is naturally how she is in her private life, together with her own children and her husband.

Freja also believes that one is born with certain characteristics that make a person particularly suited to working with young children. According to Freja, believing that these characteristics can be learned may be problematic:

I believe you can learn [to care] but then it's not natural... For I believe the children see through it. I believe the children see if I mean it. Am I that person? And I often believe that the way you speak with children, when you speak, how you speak, and also what you signal, I believe you can't learn that (Freja).

The manner in which Freja, and even Barbara, speak of care is reminiscent of Noddings' "natural caring," which is done out of natural inclination (Noddings 1995). The practitioners primarily "want" to care rather than feeling that they "ought" to care. It is this "want" that has led them into early years, continuing to influence their daily interactions with the children. The women regard themselves as having been "called to care" and have consciously sought out work that will provide a place for the expression of what they regard as their nature. Rather than distancing themselves from feminine values and the idea of the "educational calling" (Tallberg Broman 1995) associated with the preschool's early formation, Freja and Barbara find pleasure and a sense of fulfilment, worth, and importance

in their carework. This stands in contrast to Lidholt's (2000) fieldwork, which revealed that practitioners primarily find meaning in their work through pedagogy rather than care. Freja and Barbara deeply value the feminine, that which tends to be devalued by society (Acker 2006; Berntsson 2000). Along with this comes the valuing of the characteristics they bring with them from the feminine-coded private sphere of home where the attributes they hold in highest regard have been fostered and nurtured.

At the same time as personal and emotional characteristics are emphasised as being of most importance in working with young children, the practitioners are still positive towards education and feel proud to have gained qualifications within early years. There is an awareness of the status that education gives that simply working with children does not (Brante 2014; Löfgren 2016; Sheridan et al. 2011). Freja also mentions that there are advantages to meeting others working within the field and discussing literature and ideas with them. Still, Freja maintains that it is not necessary to have a degree in early years to be a good practitioner:

I don't believe you have to have an early years degree or nursery nurse training. I believe there are those that have it in them in a way, who are good with children and have a good child perspective, or really human perspective with them, perhaps from home. Perhaps you have had a good upbringing and good adults who have treated you in a good way with respect and then I believe that it is easy. That you have it with you for free... Or perhaps it is the other way around. You have perhaps had an awful upbringing so you feel that you want to give something else... But I don't believe you have to be educated in order to be a good person with children (Freja).

Education, and even the curriculum, are viewed as being more important for raising the status of preschool work than of actually being of importance in practice with the children. Discussions surrounding competence in practice always fell back to the emotional characteristics of the individual who either was, or was not, suited to or called to work with young children. Although professional status is important to them, neither Freja nor Barbara is willing to compromise on care in order to achieve it. That is, they are not willing to make a move towards masculine ways of thinking and working in order to gain full professional status

(Hearn 1982). In line with a vocational culture, it is the child's well-being that is of primary importance to the practitioners, not material rewards (Greiff 2006). Freja and Barbara find meaning, motivation, and satisfaction in using what they regard as their "natural inclinations" towards helping others and providing a loving environment for the children in their care. Ascribing their skills to "nature" is not seen as problematic (see Sverige 2006), but rather as of benefit to the children who are able to be cared for by those who "want" to care, rather than by those who are simply doing their duty (Noddings 1995).

5.2 Practice as an Extension of Home

According to the current curriculum (Skolverket 2016:13), the preschool should "supplement" the home, acting as a complement to the home environment⁷. In accordance with the data from Little Roots, however, it is possible to view practice as an "extension" of home rather than a complement, although distinct differences between the preschool and home arenas persist.

There is no doubt that the children's homes continue to hold a central position during their daily life in preschool. The children make constant reference to their parents and home and are encouraged to do so by the practitioners. Conversations about home were particularly prevalent during mealtimes when the children and practitioners sat down together to eat and talk. These conversations often focused on, for example, what the children had eaten for breakfast, what they would do when they got home, who was going to pick them up, and what toys they like to play with at home:

Freja: Your granny and granddad are coming soon to pick you up. Then maybe you will have a snack. You usually do that. You can see if you can buy a semla, if there are any left.

Sven: Yes. Semla. Mummy and Daddy are going to a concert.

Freja: Are you going too?

⁷ In the new curriculum (Skolverket 2018a), the focus is on collaboration with the home rather than supplementing the home.

Sven: No.

Freja: Is the concert only for adults?

Sven: Yes.

Freja: Are granny and granddad going to look after you then?

Sven: Yes.

There is a sense of connections being maintained so that although the children are not at home during the day with their families, these aspects of life have not ceased to exist. Freja says that it is important for her to know about the children's lives outside preschool and about the wider family circle – siblings, grannies, granddads, uncles, aunts – the people who are important to the children. A section about family is even included in the information sheet about the child that the parents are asked to fill out upon the child's enrolment in the preschool. According to Freja, knowing and talking about their families helps the children feel more secure during their time in the preschool as they are not as isolated from home. Furthermore, Freja mentions that knowing about the family assists in building relationships with the children, letting them know that she is there as an additional carer, not a replacement.

The connection between the home and the preschool is also seen in the preschool's documentation practices, which seem to be more concerned about maintaining contact between the children and their parents, as well as caring for the parents who are perhaps missing their children, rather than being concerned with pedagogical development and professional notions of accountability (Löfgren 2016; Noddings 2013). The practitioners explained that they use photography to document the children's daily life at preschool in pictures as this is what the parents want and like to see. Freja pointed out that these photographs are of particular importance during the child's first weeks in the preschool. The practitioners take several photographs during this time and send them to the parents at work. According to Freja, this helps the parents feel secure and enables

them to maintain some form of contact with their child's daily life away from home.

There appears to be a desire to stretch the arms of care out from the home to incorporate the preschool, thereby creating a larger circle of care around the child. It is this notion that I am referring to in describing Little Roots as an extension of home rather than a complement, which to me suggests a sharper distinction between the two arenas. Perhaps it is due to their own views on where young children should ideally be cared for that results in the practitioners eagerness to establish and maintain strong connections with the home. Freja and Barbara are critical of Swedish society, which provides few opportunities for parents to care for their children full-time after the age of about one year (Halldén 2007). Both women took an extended amount of leave after the birth of their own children, not wanting to place them in the care of others at a young age. In line with Montessori (2007), Barbara says that in an ideal world one-year-olds would not be in preschool, but at home:

I would absolutely not start as a one-year-old... It's difficult. The young children. It's very sensitive. They have just one year at home and suddenly they are in a large group with other adults. It's a very big difference... But it is this that society is built on; that everyone must work, earn money. And that which young children need is closeness, love, and the little things... They don't need so much... (Barbara)

Freja also mentions that the reason the youngest children are in preschool has more to do with the economy than with what is best for children. She too views the majority of young children as being best cared for at home. At the same time, Freja believes that if the children can spend their days in a small group with loving and caring adults then it shouldn't be detrimental to their well-being to spend time in preschool as a one-year-old. According to Freja:

They [the children] can't get exactly the same things as home, but almost. There should be a lot of the usual, the security and nappies and food and love (Freja).

Indeed, Freja views the preschool as being closer to home than to school, in contrast to the perceived schoolification of early years (Berntsson 2006; Jönsson

et al. 2012; Lidholt 2000; Löfdahl & Folk-Fichtelius 2015; Löfgren 2016; Waldenström 2014). Freja dislikes the word “preschool” as it places emphasis on “school,” that which is to come. Freja herself grew up during the “dagis (daycare) era” and, unlike many preschool teachers (see Enö 2011; Hulshof 2016; Leone 2016; Malin N. 2011; Olofsson 2010), is positive to the use of this word as it lies nearer her own perception of what the preschool is. According to Freja, the preschool is “a home where we are during the day.”

Referring back to Freja’s comment regarding the fact that the children in preschool cannot get exactly the same things as they do at home, this is something that both practitioners are acutely aware of. Thus, although I believe it is possible to view Little Roots as an extension of home, the heart of home still lies beyond the preschool walls. One of the most distinct differences, according to Freja and Barbara, is the fact that in preschool the children must learn to be part of a group and the practitioners must take into consideration the needs of many children, rather than simply a few:

We have many children to see, to see all the children and listen to what they want and how they feel. To see them... For me, the biggest difference is that at home the children are with adults, perhaps a sibling or two, but here we are a group and that is... It is completely different to be in a group. And it’s also the same for us adults. We must always keep this in mind (Barbara).

Therefore although the practitioners wish to give the children as much of the same things they would receive at home, there are still characteristics of the home environment that are non-transferable.

Overall, however, that which I observed and heard in the interviews with Freja and Barbara points to a strong desire to provide for the children as much of the individual care, love, attention, affection, and support as they would receive at home, whilst also recognising that an exact replication in the strictest sense can never be achieved. A good example of this concerns the preschool’s youngest child, Nina, who is one year old. I noticed that each day I left the children and practitioners to settle down to rest after lunch, Freja would be holding Nina in her arms. Freja explained that Nina was still breastfeeding when she started at the

preschool and was used to falling asleep at the breast. Her mother wondered how Nina would cope sleeping in the preschool when she was not used to putting herself to sleep. Rather than viewing this as an opportunity to “teach” Nina how to sleep on her own, the solution was that Freja would hold Nina and rock her to sleep, which takes approximately five minutes. Then, once she was asleep, Freja could place Nina gently on the mattress lying on the floor by her side. Freja could not replicate the sleep routine from home, but she could approximate it, attempting to give Nina a similar routine.

This finding, which points to the practice at Little Roots being an extension of home rather than a precursor to school, departs from the findings of previous studies that suggest the contrary (Berntsson 2006; Lidholt 2000; Löfdahl & Folk-Fichtelius 2015; Löfgren 2016; Waldenström 2014). Indeed, what is seen in the data is a place for children that, like Martin’s Schoolhome, is taking on many, but not all of the functions of home (Martin 1995a). The practitioners are active in modelling their practice on the home and the family even if they are aware that differences are, and should be, expected. As Freja says:

They [the children] have a closer attachment to their parents, I hope... We shouldn’t be the parent. I shouldn’t take that role. So it’s a fine balancing act... You should have a good attachment, but I must be careful of taking on a parental role... (Freja).

According to the practitioners, there is only ever one “true” home.

5.3 Practice as Domestic Work

A lot of time in the preschool is taken up with the feminine-coded reproductive work associated with the home (Acker 2006; Berntsson 2000; Fraser 2013; Sisson & Iverson 2014). This work includes dressing, undressing, tidying, eating, and toilet activities. Both the children and the practitioners are involved in these activities and there is no apparent division in terms of who is responsible for the various tasks (see Enö 2011).

Tidying takes place several times a day, most often in routine transitions between activities, for example when transitioning from “free play” to circle time.

The children are encouraged and indeed expected to help. Sometimes a few of the children became resistant to the request to tidy, requiring some gentle persuasion to gain their participation, but for the most part the children cooperated with the practitioners, taking part in the hive of activity that would occur before settling down to the next part of the day.

Whilst participating in tidying up toys was expected, the work of setting the table for lunch or preparing the main room for rest was voluntary. For example, rather than saying, "Help me set the table," the practitioners posed the question, "Would you like to help me set the table?" offering the choice to answer yes or no. This choice is also referred to in the preschool's booklet, "The Child in the Centre," which states that "The children can help set the table if they wish, otherwise we practitioners do it, we try to encourage the children to set their own place." Once the children have eaten, however, they are expected to scrape any remaining food on their plate into the bin, before placing it on the tray to be carried to the kitchen.

The practitioners mentioned that it is important that everyone helps with tidying as if some children continue to play and take out toys during this time the tidying would never finish. This is not the case, however, with regard to setting the table. Whilst the practitioners wish to encourage the children to help with this task, they are also reluctant to interrupt the children's play to do so. The children are thus given the choice in this case as to whether or not to assist. Regardless of their decision, they still see the process involved in preparing the table and food for mealtimes and, as mentioned, they see that this work is not delegated in accordance with a hierarchy that sees some work as being "less worthy" for those who have a university degree (Sisson & Iverson 2014). Thus, there is no sense of a devaluing of women's domestic work in order to give the appearance of professionalism (Crispin 2017; Enö 2011; Hearn 1982; Noddings 1990). Sometimes it is the nursery nurse who prepares mealtimes, whilst at other times it is the preschool teacher.

During mealtimes, the children serve themselves from the various dishes placed on the table. There are also two small jugs from which the children pour their own drinks. In the department's booklet, it is mentioned that "this is something that you [the parents] are welcome to do at home," that is, to provide child-sized jugs to enable the children to pour by themselves. Here it is possible to discern a harking back to the early preschools that sought to influence the home through the domestic work performed together with the children in the institution (Carlsson & Johansson 2000; Tallberg Broman 1995).

In asking whether or not the practitioners believe there is a place for domestic work in today's preschool, both Barbara and Freja replied with a definite "yes." Freja refers to the fact that Little Roots is a Montessori preschool and so practical domestic activities should be an integral part of the preschool's practice:

With us, a Montessori preschool, they should be found. And so we bake sometimes. Perhaps once a month and perhaps more depending on exactly what the children thought. In November and December we pressed a lot of oranges and they got to do that. And cleaning the windows, they can do that when they want. And help out. But I wish that there was perhaps a little more of it, but I also think that I have to read the children, what they are interested in and what is fun at the moment. And then sometimes I feel that they just need to play (Freja).

Barbara is also positive to the inclusion of domestic activities in preschool, although she recognises that this view may be regarded as "old-fashioned":

I am a little old-fashioned. Yes, they are nice things. Perhaps we do them in the preschool, but it depends on the children. It is access to life and it will always apply. It is a part of life.... Why not have that feeling of home? It is nice. Nice.... We did such things previously and they are valuable for me, but now they are often excluded. Everyone is stressed and doesn't want to do so much... Cooking food or cleaning the table, cleaning the windows, vacuuming, they are fun. They are fun things. It is life (Barbara).

Certainly there is no echo of the domophobia that Martin (1995a) speaks of, nor is there any sense of domestic work being "beneath" the women's education or a threat to their status and professionalism (Enö 2011; Sisson & Iverson 2014). No anxiety exists regarding the domestic, which, in line with Martin (1995a) and Noddings (2002, 2003), is regarded as being a natural part of life that everyone

has responsibility for. As Barbara mentions, domestic work is “access to life,” as reproductive work brings us into contact with what it means to live and maintain life (Martin 1995a; Montessori 2008; Noddings 2002, 2003). This work is to be valued and made visible for the children, providing the space and opportunity for them to be included in the work of keeping everyday life functioning. At the same time, there is an awareness that the children might have other ideas as to how they wish to spend their time and the practitioners respect this. Although Freja and Barbara are both positive to the children involving themselves in domestic tasks, the children’s perceived need to play is regarded as being of priority. On the one hand it is possible to see this as a departure from the notion of home, as play is perhaps prioritised over domestic work, but on the other hand, and as I perceive it, it may be said that prioritising play actually makes the preschool *more* like a home for the youngest children. The important question here is, how much domestic work would the children be involved in if they were spending their days at home? If the answer is, as I suspect with regard to one- to three-year-olds, that the majority of time at home would be spent in play then it can indeed be said that placing “free play” before domestic work in the preschool contributes to the creation of a homelike environment in the institution. Furthermore, focusing on freedom and play assists in maintaining a clear distinction between the preschool and school, thus pushing back against schoolification (Berntsson 2006; Jönsson et al. 2012; Waldenström 2014)

Dressing, undressing, and toilet activities, such as washing hands, changing nappies, and using the toilet or potty are also examples of reproductive work that both children and practitioners spend a lot of time engaging with. Once again, these tasks are performed cooperatively as the children learn the work of self-care together with the practitioners:

Freja notices that Nina’s nose is very runny. “Can you fetch some paper for your nose, Nina?” she says. “Should you fetch some paper?” Nina fetches a tissue from the box of tissues sitting on a low shelf nearby and wipes her nose.

“Did it go ok? Can I see?” asks Freja. Nina runs over to Freja and throws her arms around her for a big hug, before sitting down on her knee (Fieldnotes 2019-03-08).

Rather than distancing themselves from these activities, as could be seen in Folkman’s study (2017), or even insisting on a drive towards complete independence as can be the tendency in Montessori education where it is stated that “all unnecessary help is an obstacle to the child’s development” (Skjöld Wennerström & Bröderman Smeds 2008:44), the practitioners seem to savour these moments, which often involve one-to-one interactions with individual children. For the practitioners, the reproductive work involved in the daily life of the preschool is strongly connected with notions of closeness, togetherness, and oneness; that the preschool, like the home, is a shared space where life is lived in relationship with each other. As Freja said when discussing the act of assisting a child in putting on her outdoor clothes, “It is a great opportunity to get to know a child better and get closer to them whilst engaging in a one-to-one conversation and interaction.”

5.4 Practice as Relationship and Connection

Relationship and connection are essential aspects of the practitioners’ practice. Indeed, this is the starting point for all that occurs within the framework of the preschool as a three-week long schooling-in period provides ample opportunity for the children to get to know the practitioners and feel safe and secure in their care. According to “The Child in the Centre”:

We have three weeks schooling-in and we have chosen this in order to give your child the possibility to attach to us practitioners. This means that during three weeks the practitioner will develop, obtain, and build up a close relationship with the child. When the child needs a little extra security or comfort of some form, the child should feel safe with the primary contact practitioner so that the need for a parent is activated as little as possible during the preschool day.

Along with food, rest, and dry nappies, relationships are included in the booklet as one of the child’s basic needs. This is in keeping with Martin’s (1995a) “back to basics” domestic curriculum, with the basics being the three Cs in contrast to the

three Rs. Nowhere does it mention the basics as being about learning and development.

The practitioners associate relationship and connection with the child's sense of security in the preschool. They are aware that it can be difficult for the children to leave their primary family attachments in order to spend the day with people who are, at least in the beginning, simply strangers. According to Freja, a lot of work and thought goes into establishing and maintaining close connections with the children so that they receive as much of the affection, love, attention, and closeness as they would at home. Establishing and maintaining these relationships takes time, which both Freja and Barbara say is a challenge for practitioners due to increasing curricular demands. Freja, however, is insistent on the importance of time for the children so that relationships can be secure. Thus, this is a priority for her that should not be compromised for other objectives. When asked what is most important for her in working with the children, Freja replied:

It is time. That there is time. That I don't have to do so many other things. And that there is time to be there for the children... To not always interrupt. That there doesn't always have to be circle time or... And that they feel that I really care (Freja).

Freja and Barbara emphasise that having a small child group enables them to spend more time with the children, facilitating the building of relationships. Certainly, when observing, there was plenty of time for hugs, sitting on knees, and one-to-one interaction. It was possible to observe the dance of care, and the reciprocity of the care relationship as described by Noddings (2002, 2013), as the practitioners had learned to read the children's signals and knew the correct way to respond to them:

The children are sitting on the floor around Freja who is reading them a book. Nina gets a little restless and stands up, walking over to Barbara who is also sitting together with the children. Barbara gives Nina a cuddle and Nina then clambers on Barbara whilst still looking towards Freja who continues to read. Nina finally comes to rest, standing on Barbara's crossed legs with her cheek against Barbara's cheek. Barbara turns to look at her and Nina smiles. Barbara smiles back (Fieldnotes 2019-03-06).

Barbara recognises Nina's need for closeness as she approaches and responds in a manner that appears to satisfy this need. That is, Barbara recognises, receives, and is responsive to Nina, and Nina, in her smile, seems to recognise, receive, and be responsive to Barbara's act of care, thus completing the caring relationship as described by Noddings (2002, 2013). There were moments, however, although few, when routines or goals presented an obstacle to relationship and connection; when signals were missed or when connections were interrupted in order to perform other work:

It is circle time and the children are watching Freja who is organising some props that she is going to use for telling the children a story. Nina walks over to Barbara. "Do you want to sit here?" asks Barbara, lifting Nina onto her knee and putting her arms around her.

Freja begins the story and Barbara lifts Nina off her knee, placing her gently on the floor by her side. She stands up to fetch the iPad in order to take photographs to document the activity.

Barbara returns to her place beside Nina and lies forward on the rug so as to have a better position for taking pictures. Nina also leans forward, looking at the image on the screen and then looking at Barbara. Barbara, however, is focused solely on taking photographs and does not make eye-contact with Nina (Fieldnotes 2019-03-07).

Such moments were few and yet they perhaps serve as a warning with regard to connection and relationship in preschool. Curricular demands, such as documentation, risk moments of *disconnection* when accountability and meeting goals means taking time away from simply being in the present moment with the children. Hence, working within the curricular framework can demand paying attention to motivational displacement, where the needs of the cared-for are given primacy over everything else (Noddings 2013). This can be seen in the following example:

The children are sitting at the table, painting. Beside them, on a beanbag, sits Barbara who has an iPad in her hands and is preparing to take photos to document the activity. Nina walks in front of the camera just as Barbara is ready to take the first photo. Barbara lowers the iPad and sets it down. Then she wraps her arms around Nina, in a hug. "Yes. I'll do it later," she says quietly. Nina and Barbara continue to hug each other before Nina eventually

relaxes her arms, signalling to Barbara that she is ready to move on. Barbara too relaxes her arms and Nina wanders off to play (Fieldnotes 2019-03-06).

Here, the moment of relationship and connection takes precedence and, from what I observed, Barbara never got her chance to document the activity. Nina's need of togetherness was prioritised over the demand for documentation as Barbara became engrossed in and committed to Nina's needs (Noddings 2013). When these needs were met and satisfied, Nina signalled this in the relaxing of her arms in the hug.

It should be noted that the relationship between the practitioners and children does not cease to matter when the children are absent from the preschool. Children who are absent due to, for example, illness or travel are still "included" in the practitioners' thoughts and actions. During circle time, for example, when name labels were placed on the mat for the children to try to find their own name, the names of the absent children were included. The practitioners told the children why the others were absent and, if they were ill, would talk about how they hoped they would get better soon. One child, Anna, became sick at the end of the week and was absent on the Friday. She had a birthday party planned for the Saturday and all the children were invited. The practitioners talked about the party with the children during the day, maintaining connection not only with the present children and their lives outside the preschool, but also with Anna, showing that they cared about her well-being and the fact that it was her birthday:

The children are eating lunch. "Are you all going to Anna's party?" Freja asks. "We should hope that Anna gets better. It's sad to be sick when you are going to have a party."

"Yes," replies Sven (Fieldnotes 2019-03-08).

In accordance with Noddings (2013), the caring relationship remains even in physical absence.

The practice of relationship and connection as seen in the research data can be summed up in three words, "I see you." In every caring interaction, this was the central tenet; I see you, I understand you, and I'm willing to answer. There was

eye contact, physical contact, and a sense of engrossment in the world of the other (Noddings 2013):

Nina stands in front of Barbara who is kneeling on the floor. They are eye to eye. Barbara smiles and Nina smiles back. “Head,” she says whilst patting herself on the head. She pats Nina on the head, repeating the word, “head.” “Eyes,” she says whilst pointing at her eyes. “Eyes,” she says again pointing at Nina’s eyes. “Mouth.” Barbara points at her own mouth. “Mouth,” she repeats whilst pointing at Nina’s mouth. Nina smiles widely and throws her arms around Barbara in a hug (Fieldnotes 2019-03-05).

Whilst it is possible to interpret this observation from the perspective of language learning, my own interpretation of this moment is that it was more about connection and relationship than learning. It was a moment of togetherness with a message of “I see you” and “I am like you.” The reply from Nina was not one of words, but rather a hug that seems to show that the relationship is secure.

Both Freja and Barbara are constantly present with the children, engaging the smiles and hugs that show that relationships have been established. These relationships are not taken for granted, but rather a lot of work goes into seeing that they are established and maintained. In the end, what is seen is an affectionate environment where the children seek closeness with the practitioners who are rarely so preoccupied with other activities that they fail to respond. I have named this theme, “Practice as relationship and connection,” however, I also could have chosen the word “love,” although relationship and connection is perhaps more in keeping with the words used by Martin (1995a) and Noddings (2013). There is, however, in accordance with Martin’s desire (1995b:357), a “spirit of family-like affection” in Little Roots and the practitioners have no issue about speaking of the need for love in the preschool, even using the word “love” themselves with the children:

The children are at the table, eating lunch. “I love you,” says Sven to Freja. “I love you too,” she replies (Fieldnotes 2019-03-04).

It is this love, affection, relationship, that seems to permeate every aspect of Little Root’s practice. Rather than simply being paid strangers, the practitioners seek to ensure the children are cared for by people who “love” them (see Noddings 2001).

5.5 Practice as Distinctive for the Youngest Children

Both practitioners recognise working in the toddler department as being distinctive from working with the older children, a distinction that is not made in the national curriculum (Skolverket 2016, 2018a). In line with Carlberg et al. (2012), Freja and Barbara believe that the curriculum fails to take into consideration the youngest children's needs, which are overlooked in favour of the educative aspects of the preschool that hold more prestige (Berntsson 1999, 2000, 2006; Enö 2011; Löfgren 2016). According to Freja:

There is so much focus on... what I should do. Just what I should teach. There isn't a lot on care and therefore I think that "Småbarnens läroplan" builds a lot more on care and it is really that which I want to comply with when I have the youngest... And so I think that we have lost a lot of the caring aspects (Freja).

Freja views the unofficial curriculum, "Småbarnens egen läroplan" (Carlberg et al. 2012), as being more in touch with toddlers' needs as the primary focus is care. In "The Child in the Centre," it is this unofficial curriculum that takes centre stage, and indeed no direct reference is made to the official curriculum. It should, however, be noted that the national curriculum is the starting point for the unofficial curriculum, which interprets the official document based on the needs of the one- to three-year-olds. Quoting directly from "Småbarnens egen läroplan" (ibid.:13), "The Child in the Centre" states that "for the youngest children, care takes precedence over learning." The practitioners are explicit in informing the parents that they work first and foremost with care, not teaching. This is in accordance with what the practitioners regard as being the children's primary needs, placing those needs before any desire for status or attempt to comply with preconceived notions of professionalism (Berntsson 1999; Brante 2014; Enö 2011; Löfdahl & Folke-Fichtelius 2015). It is the perceived needs of the youngest children that direct the practitioners' practice rather than allowing practice to be directed from above. Indeed, Freja is sceptical and critical towards practice being directed by official curriculum policy, even if she is positive towards the preschool curriculum's existence:

I think it is good that it exists, but I wish that it perhaps wasn't those people who wrote it that wrote it (laughs)... Perhaps there could be more people who work in reality who write it (Freja).

This is a recurring criticism that Freja expresses towards official preschool guidelines; a disparity between goals and reality. Like many other preschool teachers (see Tallberg Broman & Persson 2002, 2018), Freja too finds herself caught in a dilemma due to conflicting priorities. That being said, perhaps due to the fact that she has many years of experience in the field, Freja appears secure in her own convictions regarding best practice. Freja also draws on the work and knowledge of others who, like her, wish to see greater emphasis on care, in order to strengthen her argument for prioritising care in preschool practice. Additionally, when Freja transferred from working with older children to working in the toddler department, she contacted one of the authors of the unofficial curriculum in order to gain extra insight into how best to support and care for the youngest children. Once again, this shows an awareness of the distinctive nature of working with one- to three-year-olds.

Freja says that she wishes that the unofficial curriculum had a more dominant role in the preschool:

I wish it was more accessible for our parents, but it is of course not a "curriculum." Many say it is just a brochure. It doesn't hold a lot of weight. Unfortunately (Freja).

Whilst the official curriculum is freely available and accessible to anyone, the unofficial curriculum, referred to by Freja as a "brochure," is not. Furthermore, as Freja mentions, in contrast to the official curriculum, the unofficial curriculum does not hold much weight when making arguments for best practice. Thus, it could be said that there is a degree of activism involved in distinguishing between working with the toddlers and working with the older children, as the practitioners appear to "fight" to uphold what they regard as being the primary needs of this age group, regardless of directives from above that seem to push in another direction.

Barbara echoes Freja's words in her own thoughts on the national curriculum, stating that:

It is easy to forget that the youngest children have other needs than other children. They need another tempo... This short period is very important and it must be as good as possible for the little child. You shouldn't be in a rush and skip over things.... You must give, during this short period, the best possible care. It's a very big difference and it can be forgotten and perhaps we give them the same things as the older children. Perhaps. But no, we have another world (Barbara).

That which the practitioners regard as being distinctive in terms of practice with the youngest children is the amount of care required in working with them, as well as the amount of time taken up by that care. Many hours each day are devoted to changing nappies, napping, eating, comforting, soothing, and building relationships, whilst the curriculum increasingly emphasises subject areas such as mathematics, language, science, technology, and even digital technology (Skolverket 2018a). According to Barbara, this risks disrupting the calm tempo required in order to meet the needs of the youngest children:

They are tired. Often. They don't cope like the older children, playing all the time. They need a little break, and hugs and closeness. And it's important to just be. You shouldn't forget that, I think. Because if it is a large group, there can be a lot of activities. All the time things are happening, but the youngest children need another tempo. They need to hop, but then they need to wind down and rest (Barbara).

According to the practitioners, it is the "little things" that would, or at least should, be provided at home that are of greatest importance for toddlers. As Freja says, what the youngest children really need is "the usual." Both Barbara and Freja believe that there is a lot of pressure and focus on children as "becomings," always thinking about what comes next rather than focusing on the children's needs in the present. A child who starts preschool at the age of one has five years until s/he reaches school age and yet already aspects of school influence the one-year-old's day in preschool (Berntsson 2006; Jönsson et al. 2012; Lidholt 2000; Löfdahl & Folk-Fichtelius 2015; Löfgren 2016; Waldenström 2014). The practitioners at Little Roots, on the other hand, define practice with the one- to

three-year-olds as being more in keeping with home than with school, shielding them from the perceived pressures of schoolification and future productivity (see Waldenström 2014). As Barbara mentions, the toddler department is its “own world,” what could be described as an “oasis” where the practitioners’ strong convictions regarding the distinctive nature of practice with the youngest children allow care to take precedence over everything else.

5.6 Practice as Physical and Emotional Care

The practitioners identify physical and emotional care as core aspects of their work. Unlike Jonsdottir and Paggetti’s (2016) interview study, where the physical aspects of care were seldom discussed by teachers, Freja and Barbara make frequent reference to the physical care activities involved in working with the youngest children. According to Barbara:

There are two levels [of care]; the physical care and the psychological, the emotional. They are interconnected... The children have to have the foundation. To feel that they are warm and then food, rest so their body has energy, the physical care... Holding their hands, hugs. And then the psychological; body language, words, stories, that is so important. Things that the children think are important (Barbara).

As Barbara mentions, there are two aspects of care that the practitioners see as being interconnected; the physical and the emotional. It is not enough to simply change a child’s nappy, ensuring that s/he is dry, but, in agreement with Noddings’ (1995, 2013), there also needs to be an emotional connection and relationship between the practitioner and the child. This is illustrated in the following incident:

Barbara is in the toilet, changing Anton’s nappy. I can’t see what is going on in the small room, but I hear a lot of crying and yelling before Barbara comes out alone. Freja, who is sitting on the floor doing a jigsaw with a small group of children, looks up. “Should I take it?” she asks. Barbara nods in reply and Freja stands up and walks towards the toilet. Barbara sits down on the mat beside me. The crying has stopped.

“He is very determined,” Barbara says. “He wanted to have Freja. He kicked his legs. We have to respect this... We have to take into consideration who the child wants to change their nappy. But it becomes difficult if everyone wants the same person.”

Freja returns to the main room together with Anton who shows no sign of being upset (Fieldnotes 2019-03-07).

Anton does not only require physical care in the form of new nappy, but he also requires his physical needs to be taken care of by someone with whom he feels he has a secure relationship. Barbara reads Anton's signals and responds to them in a manner that leads to him receiving both the emotional and physical care he requires. Freja, who was involved in an activity with a few of the other children, showed no hesitation in responding to Anton's needs and wishes, but rather immediately left what she was doing and proceeded to care for Anton. Anton's response to Freja, whereby he stopped kicking and crying, can be interpreted as showing that his needs were met.

As Barbara points out, situations such as these can become challenging if one practitioner is preferred for all nappy changes. Additionally, it may prove difficult to meet such emotional needs if a practitioner's priorities lie elsewhere. Taking the example of the aforementioned situation, Freja was initially doing a jigsaw of the world with the children, discussing which animals live in the various continents. Freja may have decided that the "learning activity" should take precedence and that Anton should "learn" to be cared for by others. This, however, was not how she chose to deal with the situation. Instead, Freja showed what could be described as "motivational displacement" (Noddings 2013), whereby primacy was given to Anton's need to have his physical requirements taken care of by the practitioner who he had the closest relationship with and would be receptive towards.

The above situation which sees a transfer of care from the nursery nurse to the preschool teacher is also interesting to consider in light of the fact that there is much mention of carework being transferred in the other direction so as to give preschool teachers more time to focus on children's learning (Berntsson 2000; Enö 2011; Johansson & Pramling Samuelsson 2001; Kuisma & Sandberg 2008; Löfdahl & Folk-Finctelius 2015). In Little Roots, I perceived no such transfer as both Freja and Barbara emphasised the importance of being involved in carework.

Freja and Barbara highlight the fact that the children have to have a relationship with both practitioners if they are to feel secure in the preschool and this relationship is strengthened and solidified in the reciprocal nature of caring (Noddings 1995, 2002, 2013).

In discussing the emotional aspects of care, the word “security” arose time and time again. According to Freja and Barbara, it is only within safe and secure relationships that physical and emotional care is able to take place. In the department’s welcome letter, it is therefore emphasised that during the first days of the schooling-in period, it is the parents, not the practitioners who should, for example, comfort the child and change their nappies. The practitioners wait until the child feels comfortable enough to come to them for this care, that is, until the child feels secure in a relationship with the practitioners. Once again it is possible to discern the relational view of care as emphasised by Noddings (1995, 2002, 2013). The practitioners are not simply concerned with their own intentions as a carer, but they also take into consideration how their caring intentions would be received by the child. Recognising, in line with Noddings (*ibid.*), the importance of relationship, and that care is not simply a matter of routine, the practitioners make conscious efforts to establish an ethic of care relationship such that both the emotional and physical needs of the child are met simultaneously.

There is thus an interweaving of the emotional and physical aspects of care in Little Roots, with no perceived dichotomy and/or hierarchy between these two aspects. Where I do, however, perceive a hierarchy is in terms of care and learning, and it is not, as previous studies seem to suggest, one that places care in a subordinate position to learning. Rather, it is care that is placed first in the hierarchy, taking precedence over everything else. The children’s physical and emotional well-being is that which is primarily emphasised in all the collected material for this study. Quoting once again the citation from the unofficial curriculum (Carlberg et al 2012:13) included in “The Child in the Centre,” “for the youngest children, care takes precedence over learning.”

6. Discussion and Conclusion

This thesis examines the place of Martin's domestic curriculum and the three Cs within Swedish preschools, exploring the possibility of a Schoolhome existing or being created during a time when the preschool increasingly seems to distance itself from notions of home due to an ongoing professionalisation project, which brings with it schoolification (Berntsson 2006; Jönsson et al. 2012; Lidholt 2000; Löfdahl & Folk-Fichtelius 2015; Löfgren 2016; Waldenström 2014). I went into this project with no expectation of actually finding a preschool that could be likened to Martin's (1995a) Schoolhome. That being said, after analysing the data, I believe that Little Roots may be such an example. Martin herself gave no definitive recipe to follow in creating a Schoolhome, however, the defining features of the Schoolhome (ibid.) appear to be present in Little Roots.

A pedagogy of care defines practice at Little Roots, as care, concern, and connection, the three Cs, take centre place (Martin 1995a; Noddings 1990, 1995). This care is modelled on the practitioners' notions of home, which for them is the ideal place for (the majority of) children. Home, and the reproductive work performed in the private sphere, is valued highly by the practitioners, who acknowledge their importance in providing a secure and loving environment in which children can be cared for and learn themselves what it is to care (Martin 1995a; Noddings 2002, 2003, 2013). In line with Martin (1995a, 1995b), Noddings (1990, 1995, 2002, 2013), Montessori (2007), and Key (1909), the practitioners lean towards the feminine when discussing what is of most significance for young children, feeling free to talk of their work in terms of love, relationship, closeness, and affection. In doing this, they distance themselves from the current professionalisation project that emphasises preschool work in terms of masculine-coded pedagogy and knowledge received through university education rather than personal traits (Brante 2013; Enö 2011; Greiff 2006; Hearn 1982). In some ways, the practitioners may be regarded as being engaged in Noddings' (2013) "deprofessionalisation" project, as they actively push against and critique

the current trend in Swedish early years provision, insisting that care, not learning, is the most important aspect of their work (see Carlberg et al. 2012). At the same time, however, it can also be said that the practitioners are challenging masculine notions of professionalisation as they regard themselves as professionals and, in agreement with the teachers in Tallberg Broman and Persson's study (2002), regard care as a priority for preschool work as a profession. Perhaps, therefore, their work may be viewed as offering the potential for a new definition of what the early years profession can be, allowing female worldviews and the voice of the feminine to be seen and heard (Noddings 2013).

The findings show no sign of domephobia (Martin 1995a), no devaluing of the private sphere and female roles and work, and no desire for a sharper distinction between the private and public spheres, that is home and preschool. Indeed, what is desired, is a sharper distinction between preschool and school, or, alternatively, that school becomes more like preschool, shifting both in the direction of being closer to home rather than moving ever closer to the public sphere and productive work outside the home. There is a persistent echo of Key's (1909) concerns from the preschool's early days, that the constant pressure to work outside the home negatively impacts both children and adults. The practitioners at Little Roots wish to create a kind of haven where time is provided to establish and maintain relationships and where the focus isn't always on what comes next. As Martin (1995a:41) emphasises:

The new vision of education that the Schoolhome represents does not picture young children as raw material, teachers as workers who process their students before sending them on to the next station on the assembly line... It does not conceive of school as a marketplace and children as workers, entrepreneurs, and consumers either (see also Key 1909).

And yet, it is exactly the question of what comes next that stands in focus in the preschool curriculum with its ever increasing demands on even the youngest children and those who work with them (Skolverket 2016, 2018a). These demands risk becoming obstacles to care and connection as moments of closeness and contact may be disrupted by others tasks, such as documentation, as was seen on a

few occasions in the collected material (Löfdahl & Folke-Fichtelius 2015; Löfgren 2016). Creating a Schoolhome requires the time and freedom to prioritise care, concern, and connection above all else, that is, eduCARE or CAREedu (Lidholt 2000). This, however, is made difficult when these features of practice are not prioritised in the national curriculum (Skolverket 2016, 2018a) as they are in the unofficial curriculum (Carlberg et al. 2012). Additionally, if status and the rewards that follow are not found in prioritising these aspects of preschool practice, practitioners may be reluctant to give up their pedagogical ambitions in favour of a focus on caregiving and relationship. Thus, without an active willingness and conscious effort on the part of practitioners to prioritise the three Cs, a Schoolhome may be viewed as an impossibility within the current framework of early years in Sweden. That being said, I believe that I did find a preschool that could be described as a Schoolhome, thereby suggesting that its existence *is possible*. This begs the question, how and why?

I previously mentioned that the themes that emerged from the analysis should be understood from a relational perspective as the existence of one influences the existence of the others. It is no accident that I chose to begin the analysis section with the theme entitled, “Practice as a Call to Care,” as I believe that this is the answer to the question of how and why a Schoolhome may be possible despite previous literature suggesting that care in today’s preschool is being subordinated to learning. There are only two practitioners working in the toddler department at Little Roots and *both* view their work as a calling (Greiff 2006); not a call to teach, but a call to care. Care is highly important and closely connected to the women’s sense of identity and they find meaning and purpose in their work through the belief that they are helping others and tending to their needs. As such, care is less a matter of duty than a matter of “pleasure,” as Noddings (2013) describes it. This appears to be the essential starting point for the creation of a Schoolhome; to be “called” to care, thus placing care before all else, regardless of external directives. This call to care is viewed by the practitioners as starting at home, making home the natural setting upon which to base the practice of care in

the preschool. Hence practice becomes an extension of home, which results in practice as domestic work, as relationship and connection, as distinctive for the youngest children who are so intimately connected with family and home, and as physical and emotional care, with a holistic approach to care being realised. These are the central features of Little Roots, a preschool, a Schoolhome, where the practitioners work at providing as much of the affection, care, love, connection, and closeness as the children would receive in an ideal home.

So what is the outcome of this research? What are its implications? First and foremost, this research is a critique of the direction Swedish early years provision is taking. Already in the preschool, the child learns what is of value and what is not. If aspects of home, family, relationship, care, concern, and connection are not given priority in the preschool, then, I argue that the devaluation of these aspects of life is likely to continue. Instead, the patriarchal hierarchy that values masculine-coded productive work over feminine-coded reproductive work is likely to persist (Acker 2006; Fraser 2013; Hearn 2015), leaving little opportunity for even the public sphere to become more care-centred and more interested in relationships and connection than competition and individualism. The Schoolhome provides an opportunity for a revaluing of home and the reproductive work associated with it; work that keeps everyday life going as well as nurturing and providing for new life. It is work that is bound in relationship and connection with the environments around us and with each other. According to Martin (1982:19):

It is important to remember that the decision of what to make the basics of education, like every major curriculum decision, depends not simply on what the world is but on the way we think it should be, on the kind of life we believe to be worth living and on the kind of society we believe to be worth living in.

Like Martin, Noddings, Key, and Montessori, like the practitioners at Little Roots, I too believe that the basics of education should be based on the idealised home, where hearts are nourished and people find meaning in caring for each other. Hopefully this would lead to a more kind, caring, and loving society. This is the

hope with the Schoolhome, as was the hope of Montessori (see Montessori 1992, 2007) who inspired Martin's work. I hope this study raises questions about the purpose of early childhood, as well as serving to inspire new ways of thinking about preschool practice. At the same time, it should always be remembered that the children only ever have one "true" home and hopefully it is one that they long to return to even if they do have the opportunity to spend their days in an institution that models itself on family care. For in the end, there's no place like home.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide

General Questions

1. Why did you choose to work with children?
2. Why did you choose to work with the youngest children?
3. What is your role in the preschool? What is important for you?
4. What do you think is most important when working with the youngest children in the preschool?
5. What do you think is the preschool's role in society? What is the preschool's main task?

Care

1. How would you define the word "care"?
2. What do you regard as being the similarities and differences between parental care and care in the preschool?
3. Do you think that the preschool curriculum gives enough attention to care?
4. Do you think the curriculum is adapted for the youngest children?
5. Is there much talk about care during meetings at the preschool?

Home

1. What are your thoughts on the word "dagis"?
2. What do you think of the idea of the preschool being like a home? Do you think that the current preschool is like a home?
3. Is there a place for domestic tasks in preschool?

Professionalisation

1. What are your opinions regarding preschool's professionalisation project?
2. Is it important for you that preschool teaching is regarded as a profession? Why?
3. Do you see any risks with preschool's professionalisation project?

Closing Questions

1. What is most important for you in your work with children?
2. Is there anything that you would like to add?