The aim of this article is to contribute to the discussion of the privatisation and marketisation of childcare in Sweden from the perspective of public preschool teachers. Interviews were conducted with three teachers and their principal. The respondents were asked to elaborate on their experiences of the recent establishment of a nearby private preschool and its possible impact on their own preschool practice. A narrative analysis revealed three key narratives in the data: the market narrative, the narrative of the good public preschool and the narrative of professional freedom. The key narratives made visible a local sense making and re-negotiation of cultural discourses about marketisation, making freedom of choice a prerogative for public preschool teachers instead of for parents. We argue that this may have implications for the teaching profession and teacher identity.

Key-words: privatisation, Swedish preschool, teacher professionalism, teacher identity, narrative analysis

Introduction

Privatisation and marketisation of the educational sector in general and of the preschool in particular, have been strongly pushed in Sweden during previous decades. As the consequences have mostly been discussed in terms of social and cultural segregation, there is a need to examine the ways in which the social and cultural landscape of educational policy and discourse has been altered on the ground (Apple, 2006). However, few studies about these processes have been carried out in relation to childcare, and our knowledge about how they affect preschool practices is
quite limited. This paper focuses on what happens when – for the first time – three public preschools are challenged by the opening of a private preschool in the same residential area. The aim of this paper is to identify how the teachers and head teacher, working at these preschools, make sense of their public preschool practice as a way to meet the future challenges from the establishment of the private preschool.

In Sweden, the preschool has been incorporated into the main school system, and has had its own national curriculum since 1998. It has been the subject of extensive cutbacks in financial and personnel resources, at the same time as a quantitative expansion has been carried out. The Swedish preschool system has long been one of the cornerstones of Swedish family policy. The government subsidy to public preschools (kindergartens) started in 1944 and the possibility for both parents to combine employment with family life has been emphasized throughout official reports, governmental bills and consequent reforms since the 1970s. Since the 1990s, the Swedish preschool has been the subject of extensive reform work. Consequent incorporation into the educational system moved responsibility for the preschool from the area of social policy to educational policy. In the reform work, the main task of the Swedish preschool has been stipulated as providing good care and stimulating children’s development and learning, often described as «educating». There is an obligation on the part of the municipalities to offer «universal» preschool activity to all four and five-year-old children regardless of whether their parents are unemployed or on parental leave (Skolverket, 2007). Actual numbers for 2008 show that 50% of one-year-olds and 92-98% of two to five-year-olds attend preschool. Mixed age groups are made up of children from 1-5 years of age, with 15 to 25 children (on an average of 17) in each group, generally with three full-time teachers. Opening hours are usually 6.30 am to 6.30 pm, so as to fit parents’ working hours, and it is not unusual for children to spend more than 8 h/day in the preschool.

Privately run tax-funded preschools and regular schools have been established in Sweden since the early 1990s. The tax funding makes it possible for parents to choose between public and private preschools without having to consider different fees. Up till now, private preschools have mostly remained a big city phenomenon, but recent statistics show that private preschools are available in almost 80% of Swedish municipalities and that 17% of enrolled children attend private preschools (Skolverket, 2008).

The study presented in this article is part of a research project called «The Challenged Preschool», aimed at understanding the consequences for public preschool practices following the establishment of a private preschool in the same residential area. To do this we studied the processes, thoughts and arguments made by preschool staff and management and parents reacting to the establishment of the private preschool. While other analyses focus on the perspectives and experiences of staff and management in the private preschool and of parents, this article focuses on the perspectives of the staff and head teacher of the public preschools and on how they make sense of the challenge posed to them by the private preschool.
Privatization, childcare-markets and parental choice

The overall idea behind privatization and free choice of education and childcare is that competition will lead to more efficiency and provide new opportunities to disadvantaged children (Apple, 2006) as well as increase parental involvement and participation (Bunar, 2009). It is also argued that the institutional context of the private schools will lead to more flexibility and acceptance of new strategies to reach curriculum goals, due to less bureaucracy and fewer conflicts compared with the situation in public schools (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Levin & Belfield, 2006). According to Apple (2006), such results have not been proven; rather, as shown in Bunar (2009), «freedom of choice» is both an applauded and questioned policy. In Sweden, freedom of choice is considered a «big city» phenomenon, initiating discussions about outcomes of cultural and social segregation (Bunar, 2009; Pérez Prieto et al., 2003). In this context, there has been remarkably little attention paid to teachers’ perspectives and experiences and to outcomes of pedagogical change in the wake up of marketisation, privatisation and parental freedom of choice.

In relation to other countries, the childcare market in Sweden stands out regarding the fact that both public and private preschools are tax-funded and preschools are available to all children from the age of about one. In other countries access to and use of private and public childcare facilities differs considerably (Neuman, 2005) which makes international comparisons of research on childcare markets difficult, as research mostly focus on national and local issues.

For example, in research on childcare markets in the UK, we found studies that focused on the question of whether governmental policy initiatives in providing childcare stimulate the market to create affordable childcare for all or not (Harris, La Valle & Dickens, 2004). We also found critical reviews of how the Labour Government’s intentional support of the private sector in the beginning of this century led to a surplus of childcare provision, causing turmoil on the market (Penn, 2007). In Australia, studies on the increasing emphasis of market forces, within the childcare market, show a shift in governmental distribution of funds for childcare from supporting childcare services to directing the funds straight to the parents (Cheeseman, 2007). Cheeseman suggests that this shift facilitated the market to operate with more independence from government and supposedly allowed parents to make choices within a broader market provision, though bringing with it rising fees and poor planning of the provision of children’s services. Similar results were found in Germany when Leu and Shelle (2009), focusing on the national situation, noticed how an increase of the number of places for children under three years of age has been on the governmental agenda for a number of years. One reason for this expansion of childcare for small children was to not waste educational years, in order to place Germany on a higher ranking in PISA¹ and simi-

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¹ The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is a triennial worldwide test of 15-year-old schoolchildren’s scholastic performance, the implementation of which is coordinated by the Organization for Economic Co-operation
lar examinations. These ambitions clash with the special financial support of a monthly payment given to parents who choose not to utilize childcare service for their children. The latter-mentioned policy has been criticized for potentially leading to families with low incomes taking up the offer, hindering children from more disadvantaged families from benefiting from the support of childcare services. And with the potential to lead to a failure because of the stress on early education as a means to increase the PISA, presumably results might fail. Finally, one example from China shows how the development of early childhood education is characterized by an unregulated private sector, limited financial input, lowered teacher qualifications and weak administration in all levels of the government, for which reason researchers in this local context have recommended strengthening the government administration, among other things (Jin, 2008).

As shown by the examples above, policies for early childhood care and education differ considerably from country to country, creating different conditions for privatisation and marketisation. At the same time, as these processes can be considered parts of global change, there are similarities in the challenges faced by the actors involved. The impact of marketisation on the teacher profession is one example. Cultural discourses on marketisation have depicted the teaching profession as an obstacle to the need to streamline and rationalize education (Hargreaves, 2006; Apple, 2006). Through discourses of derision (Ball, 1990) teachers have been made responsible for various supposed flaws in the public school system. Demands of market adaptation and performance have brought about a dislocation of the teacher profession and identity. Troman (2008) argues that the dedication and life-long commitment that used to characterise teachers’ work and identity are less common in the performance focused school cultures of today. This trend is confirmed in Swedish research showing that teachers of today spend more time cooperating with other adults and less time teaching and interacting with children/students (Persson & Tallberg Broman, 2002). Ball (2006) describes these changes in the teacher profession as a new professionalism, forcing teachers to pay attention both to the well-being of the children and to the marketing of schools.

Of special interest in this paper is the idea that the key elements of the reform technologies described here – market, management and performance – are devices for changing the meaning of practice and social relationships. Concepts like targets, accountability, competition, choice, privatisation etc., ‘(...) articulate new ways of thinking about what we do, what we value and what our purposes are’. (Ball, 2008: 43). The privatisation and marketisation of childcare in Sweden may thereby change what it means to be a teacher, child or parent. In the following, we argue in favour of a narrative approach, to make visible the local sense making of actors living and experiencing marketisation and privatisation of Swedish childcare through the establishment and possible challenge of a private preschool.

and Development (OECD). The aim of the PISA study is to test and compare schoolchildren’s performance across the world, with a view to improving educational methods and outcomes.
Making narrative sense through local and cultural discourse

Our starting point is a perspective on narrative as social practice (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2008; Mishler, 1999), whereby narratives or stories are seen as socially situated actions through which identities are constructed and moral and cultural order is negotiated. This means that we focus on the social activity of narrating and on what is socially and morally accomplished (i.e. justification, blame, legitimization, etc.) by people engaged in storytelling (Bamberg, 2006). De Fina and Georgakopoulou (2008: 381) phrase it in these terms: «narratives are emergent, a joint venture and the outcome of negotiation by interlocutors». Storytelling is viewed here as an integral part of daily life, through which people air, probe, synthesize or eliminate different versions of actual or possible experiences in different contexts.

Local and cultural discourses function as cultural resources for people engaged in the social practice of storytelling. Local discourses take form when people who spend much time together (colleagues, friends, classmates, family) develop a «shared interactional history» (Georgakopoulou, 2006: 86), common ways of «acting, thinking, feeling and otherwise being in the world» (Ochs & Capps, 2001: 8). Holstein and Gubrium (2000: 162) name these situated local discourses «paradigms of experience» and describe them as interpretive resources and orientations available to members in an enduring setting or group.

Other integral cultural resources employed in storytelling are cultural discourses or interpretative repertoires (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). These interpretative repertoires function as culturally sanctioned arguments of reason which can support or challenge claims of legitimacy and identity. In an interview situation, cultural discourses – as opposed to local discourses – are often (but not always) available to both interviewee and interviewer if they share experiences of growing up and/or living in the same society. From a perspective on narrative as social practice these cultural discourses are seen more or less as strategically employed by storytellers to accomplish the immediate interactional goals of a conversation (i.e., explaining, accounting, gossiping, etc.). This narrative approach thus makes visible the ways in which narrative sense making is embedded in personal and collective experiences as local discourse at the same time as it draws on wider social contexts in forms of cultural discourse.

The teachers’ and head teachers’ stories of the establishment of the private preschool draw on «ways of talking, beliefs and values» (Georgakopoulou, 2006: 99) that the teachers share with each other as colleagues working in neighbouring preschools in the same school district and under the same head teacher. Their shared interactional history becomes visible through repeated subject matter and re-occurring themes, or key narratives (Phoenix, 2008), in the interview data. As will be shown in the following analysis, these key narratives draw on local and cultural discourse as the interviewees make use of their shared interactional history as colleagues as well as on culturally available discourses of markets, public preschools and teacher professionalism. Before pre-
presenting and discussing the results of the narrative analysis, some information about the research project and the interview data will be provided below.

The data

The data presented here come from the first study carried out within «The Challenged Preschool» project. They have been collected from three public preschools located in the same residential area in a middle-sized town in Sweden. Although the residential area differs internally in SES (socio economic status) and size, the three public preschools share the same preschool head teacher and thereby belong to a common administrative local school district. Up until now, parents in this residential area have had the choice of public and a few «cooperative» (parental- or staff-operated) preschools. Competition has mainly been a minor issue between various public preschools; in this manner, the supply and demand of childcare has also been under control by head teachers, the municipal administration and local politicians. This situation changed when in late 2007 the private preschool applied for and was granted permission to establish its company. The preschool’s initial plan was to start up at least two classes, with 40 children, in the spring of 2008, and to expand to 4 classes and 80 children within a few years. Advertising in local press, personal letters to parents as well as leaflets were used in the recruiting process and attention was called to the preschool’s specific pedagogy, based on the Theory of Multiple Intelligences\(^2\). We heard about the establishment of the private preschool from teachers working in the area. As they expressed some anxiety about this upcoming competitor, we decided to research the process of the establishment of the private preschool from the perspective of the nearby public preschools. The first study, presented here, was conducted in December 2007 when the private preschool was about to open.

Open-ended interviews were conducted with the head teacher and teachers from the three public preschools. The interviews took place at the preschools and lasted for 30 to 60 minutes. The respondents were asked to elaborate on their experiences of the recent establishment of the private preschool and if and how it had any impact on their own preschool practice. Interviews were taped and transcribed literally (in Swedish). In making a translation into English, minor corrections were made to enhance readability. The analysis was conducted through repeated readings of the separate interviews, through which reoccurring themes were made visible and conceptualized as key narratives (Phoenix, 2008).

\(^2\) This theory is developed by the American psychologist Howard Gardner in the 1980’s and stress that intelligence is the ability to use their intellect, ability to solve problems or create products that are important in a cultural context, or in the community. Children are born with talent, they are multiple and we have all the talent for one or the other. We do not have all of our strengths in a single intelligence. The strengths are largely dependent on the stimuli, interests and culture.
The key narratives are to be regarded as a result of the narrative analysis and not as separate parts of the interview data. The three key narratives and the interviewees’ dependence on and struggle with cultural discourses were made visible through quotations from the interviews with Eva, the head teacher, and with Karin, Lena and Stina who worked as teachers in the three preschools. To guarantee the respondents’ anonymity all names and places are replaced.

**Public preschools and their dealings with the market**

The three key narratives that emerged are the market narrative, the narrative of the good public preschool and the narrative of professional freedom. All deal with the establishment of the private preschool, but in different ways and in line with or in opposition to cultural discourses of markets, public preschools and teacher professionalism.

**The market narrative**

«The market narrative» emerged from the ways in which the interviewees, through their various stories, made sense of finding themselves in a competitive situation and having to develop strategies, such as conveying the intrinsic good qualities of public preschool to parents, to handle the new circumstances.

According to head teacher Eva, a key concept in these strategies is communication. The news of the establishment of the private preschool in the district were the subject of broad discussions among the municipality’s public preschool head teachers as well as among the teachers. Eva told the interviewer how they discussed the upcoming competitive situation:

We talked a lot about how we handle parents and what we have to offer them. How *should* we handle them? And that’s also something we wrote down in the guidelines. Because the key to success is really communication. It’s the way we talk to and act towards parents and children.

According to Eva, brochures and the like are of no importance but rather «always doing a good job» and properly considering «what we have to offer». She admits they have not spent much time developing this «because we have so much else to do». Nevertheless, Eva made the importance of this clear to everyone in the staff, stressing that

Personal marketing has the greatest impact. When you talk to people and tell them [what you’re good at]... It’s the people in an organization who promote the trademark.

Personal marketing and a trademark to be transmitted by the people in the organization are depicted as the strategy that they have worked out to keep up with the competition.
One of the teachers, Karin, talks about discussions on the subject at staff meetings at and between each of the three public preschools:

How should we go about making the parents choose us? (…) How should we raise our profile, our own profile? Because the private preschools, they raise their profiles in a totally different manner. They are on the hunt for children.

Karin says they have been working for a long time to make their activities visible to the parents at parent-teacher meetings and through work with the preschool curriculum (Lpfö 983), which she describes as «our little bible here at the preschool». She goes on to describe how they worked with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the municipality’s plans, in order to show parents

(…) how we view the children actually doing these things, that we are actually doing these things with the children (…) That is what we are working on now, during discussions with the parents on their children’s progress. To make clearer to the parents what we actually do, on the basis of our curriculum.

The subject of communicating preschool activities to parents was also addressed by Lena, who compared it to the quality reports the preschool makes on a yearly basis.

Stating one’s business’ she says, ‘is nothing new. We submit quality reports every year where we, we are supposed to write down what we are doing and why we are doing it.

She describes this as something they as public preschool teachers have «in their backbone», and goes on to point out that this is not tacit knowledge that has never been made public but is in fact written down every year.

Both Lena and Karin stress the need to step outside the walls of the preschools and become more visible. Lena talks about the need to «raise our profile in an active way, outside the preschool, as a preventive measure». They mention «advertising or leaflets» as means of gaining publicity, beyond quality reports and the curriculum. They discuss this in terms of «working more like the private preschools do» in order to «capture the new parents», as Lena expresses it, and to keep the old ones happy. The important thing is to make and keep parents happy so they will convey the preschools’ good reputation to other parents.

«The market narrative» unfolds from the importance laid on communicating the preschool activities to the parents, from the ways parents are described as conveyors of the good reputation enjoyed by the three preschools and from the way the preschool staff is described as the transmit-
ter of their school’s trademark. This key narrative, with its emphasis on the importance of making the educational goals and activities of public preschools visible to parents and turning them into a commodity on the childcare market, taps into a cultural discourse of marketing and competition.

*The narrative of the good public preschool*

“The narrative of the good public preschool” became visible through the interviewees’ descriptions of public preschools as characterized by financial security and stability, with the municipal administration as a guarantee for quality, and by their availability to all children.

In the staff’s stories, “the market narrative” is both countered by and intertwined with this second key narrative, “the narrative of the good public preschool”, which was formed from talk of comparisons between the public preschools and the newly established private one. This was visible in Lena’s story about the first time she read the advertisement for the new private preschool. At first, she was impressed, but then she hesitated:

… wait a minute, this is not so cool. This is exactly what we are already doing in our preschool. This safeguarding of children’s abilities at different levels and their minds and everything they say they do. We do the same thing.

This line of reasoning was also picked up by Stina, who said, “It’s not very different from what we do”. Here the public preschool stands out as just as good as the private one. Beyond this there are also things that, according to all the staff interviewed, the private preschools cannot offer namely financial security and stability, the municipality as a guarantee for quality and an inclusion of all children.

The security and stability of public preschools is emphasized in relation to economic conditions for in-service training for staff. Stina says

We have, after all, a guarantee giving us financial resources for educational material, we have a budget for staff development [and] our in-service training, and we have a budget for salary increases.

These aspects of security for the staff working in public preschools are presented as something that may be lacking for staff employed in private preschools. Furthermore Stina describes public preschool activity in terms of economic stability:

There is a lot that is already clear in the municipal activities and it might vary from year to year with the budget of course, but up till now it has never been a major crisis (…)

She continues by questioning whether the owner of the private preschool can offer the same working conditions for her employees:
If she hires preschool teachers or whatever they might be, they must of course have some training in pedagogy, I guess. And of course that costs quite a lot.

The municipality, with its administration and resources, is described as an important actor for the public preschool, offering different forms of support that may not be available to private preschools. The head teacher, Eva, puts it this way:

We have our entire administration behind us. Therefore, we sort of have a bit more support of all kinds of different forms. I mean we have this special education school where we can get help and support with mentoring, etc.

The importance of their access to the special education school is stressed in relation to public preschools receiving «all kinds of children». Eva elaborates on this and emphasizes how important it is that the staff has access to counselling when working with children with special needs and also mentions other forms of expertise available to public preschools. She concludes with «So we have lots of backup from an administration with legal help and all sorts of stuff».

The subject of the municipality offering support to staff working with children with special needs touches on the third ingredient in «the narrative of the good public preschool», namely its availability to all children. This was made relevant by Lena in connection to the advertising by the private preschool, saying they would offer their children access to animals. «I wonder how they are thinking. Well then they are not for everyone really. Children with allergies and so forth».

According to Eva, who also brought up the subject, public preschools are

(... not able to [have animals] because we have our environments adapted for allergic children and we don't, we don't want that kind [of activity], don't allow it either for that matter, having animals. Because all children must be able to come here, even the ones with allergies.

Emphasizing this aspect of public preschool activity, Eva turns it into a privilege and a right for children:

So that we, when we say all, this is for all children, whether they have any disability or anything else, that you, so, so you should be able to attend a public preschool.

The head teacher’s and the teachers’ talk of financial security and stability, the support and resources offered to them by the municipality administration and the availability of public preschools to all children makes «the narrative of the good public preschool» a way to upgrade public preschool activity. While these recurring stories work to cast the private preschool in a dubious light they also function as guarantees for quality in public preschool activity. The invocation of a cultural discourse of public preschools as available to all children is visible in the empha-
sis laid on its importance by the head teacher Eva. "The narrative of the good public preschool can be understood as intertwined with "the market narrative" as it treads the path of the necessity of profiling.

**The narrative of professional freedom**

The third key narrative, "the narrative of professional freedom", took shape from stories of public preschool practice as marketable through the freedom and pedagogical flexibility of its staff. It emerged from both talk about the importance of communicating the activities of the preschool to the parents in order to keep and recruit children and the stress on several qualities characterizing public preschools. This key narrative both builds on and re-negotiates the other two.

This was exemplified in Stina’s description of how the specific pedagogical profile advertised by the private preschool may obstruct the type of pedagogical freedom characterizing public preschool activity. She describes the private preschool as:

(…) very focused on a certain pedagogy, which they are supposed to follow (…) pretty strictly, I guess, because they do not have as many resources.

When this image of the private preschool is compared to a description of public preschools as providing teachers with "a certain freedom, a huge freedom", the parental freedom of choice as one of the foundations in a cultural discourse of markets of education is both challenged and re-negotiated through "the narrative of professional freedom". Here parents' freedom of choice, which was a main issue in "the market narrative", is turned into a question of staffs' freedom of choice, working conditions and professionalism in a way that strengthens "the narrative of the good public preschool". Stina continues to compare private and public preschools: "I don't think you have the same security, freedom, opportunity, variety, and so on that you have in a public activity". She goes on to describe the public preschools as giving its staff "(…) a certain freedom and much more possibilities".

"The narrative of the good public preschool and its' characteristics are further elaborated through the emphasis on freedom and possibilities for teachers to make professional choices and change and/or develop the preschool activities in ways that meet children’s particular and changing needs. A cultural discourse of teacher professionalism is invoked in a way that questions the good of pedagogical profiling inherent in a cultural discourse of markets of education. Through "the narrative of professional freedom" the public preschool stand out as having what it takes to compete with the private preschool on the childcare market, the freedom to make decisions based on changing conditions rather than being pinioned by the advertisement of a specific pedagogical profile."
Overall, our analysis makes visible how three public preschool teachers and their head teacher drew on and re-negotiated local and cultural discourse in order to make sense of what consequences might follow upon the establishment of a private preschool, with its specific pedagogical profile. The three key narratives of «the market», «the good of public preschool» and «professional freedom» were intertwined with each other and with cultural discourses on marketing and competition, preschool as a benefit to the public, and teacher professionalism. The complexities made visible through the analysis suggest that pedagogical profiling, working conditions, availability to all children regardless of needs, and financial and personnel management are important topics to consider when discussing privatisation and marketisation of education and childcare and its consequences for the involved actors and institutions.

Discussion

The analysis shows that the three key narratives emerge through stories designed to legitimize and justify the existence and good quality of the public preschools at the same time as suspicion is cast on the private preschool, its pedagogical profile and the working conditions of the staff. Despite their differences, the three key narratives can be said to have one starting point in common, namely that the public preschools have not and don’t have to change their practice due to the establishment of the private preschool. The key narratives point to an expressed need to make visible to parents the good work that is already being done. One of the main ideas of privatisation is that competition strengthens and enhances the quality in public practices as well. The teachers’ reasoning, however, reflects a marketing strategy well known from similar studies (e.g. Bunar, 2009) in which they are not primarily intended to alter the content of their activity, but where public preschool staff is inclined to change the way of communicating about their preschools. Their talk about the key to success in terms of communication illustrates the staff’s awareness of how to keep up with the competition.

Although the actual establishment of the private preschool and the interviewer’s questions about their experiences and thoughts regarding the new situation may have triggered their awareness of an increased vulnerability to competition, the three teachers and their head teacher expressed a confidence in their own preschool practice as secure, stable and flexible. The local discourse speaking through the key narratives points at a shared perspective on the situation among the staff. This perspective suggests that whatever measures are taken to deal with the situation, it is a joint struggle. One important finding related to this is that the establishment of the private preschool seemed to have prompted a series of staff meetings where this was discussed among a group of preschool head teachers. In her struggle to deal with the market situation, the head teacher also arranged joint meetings between the preschools and thus managed to create a
common -public front- against the possible threat of the private preschool. Talking about -management support as a guarantee for a good activity- also appears to have been input to the teachers when they emphasize that the public preschool has resources to receive all children. This indicates that the municipal administration and management of public preschools can function as a powerful actor on the Swedish childcare market.

Another important finding is the interviewees’ stories of good working conditions and pedagogical freedom for preschool staff as a sellable commodity on the childcare market. This was made visible through -the narrative of professional freedom- and counters research indicating a split in two directions within the provision of childcare, with care-oriented and market-oriented practices set against each other (see, for example, Campbell-Barr, 2009). What appears as remarkable in our results is that both of these directions are expressed relevant to the public preschool in the course of -the market narrative- and -the narrative about the good public preschool- and merge in -the narrative of professional freedom-. We have considered -the narrative of professional freedom- as a re-negotiation of the cultural discourse of markets of education and childcare and its emphasis of parental choice. The teachers stress that professional freedom in public preschools makes it possible for staff to choose the currently most suitable pedagogy and promotes a feeling of safety and security. Through -the narrative of professional freedom-, the teachers raise their own public profile which is about variation in pedagogical approaches and which in some ways makes -the market narrative- part of -the narrative of the good public preschool-. As the childcare market is a reality in Sweden, it is no longer possible for the staff of public preschools to avoid the discussion of competition. This study shows that by choosing the concept of freedom of choice and -loading- it with a different meaning, the public preschool staff re-negotiates the cultural discourses of marketisation and privatisation by joining flexibility and possible educational strategies to the narrative of the good public preschool. This re-negotiation supports Ball’s (2008) argument that key elements of these reform technologies offer new ways of speaking and thinking about childcare and teachers’ work and thus of what it means to be a teacher, parent or child.

This local re-negotiation of cultural discourses of marketisation, making freedom of choice a prerogative for public preschool teachers instead of for parents, may have further implications for the teacher profession and teacher identity. In a context where the teaching profession has long been subjected to criticism, provoking defensive strategies, -the narrative of professional freedom- makes certain teacher identities available which have not been visible in the public debate previously. Built, as they are, on claims of professional knowledge, these identities can help teachers regain some of the responsibility they have lost for school management and the development of the teacher profession.

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