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Doctor in Education
Thesis

Professional Roles, Leadership and Identities of Icelandic Preschool Teachers: Perceptions of Stakeholders

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Abstract

Professional roles, leadership and identities of Icelandic preschool teachers: Perceptions of stakeholders

The purpose of the thesis is to investigate how the professional role and leadership of preschool teachers are perceived by them and other stakeholders and what contextual factors affect the preschool teachers' role and leadership. A further purpose is to investigate how preschool teachers see their professional identity and how the stakeholders' perceptions and relevant contextual factors appear to affect this. The research also has a political purpose as it is giving a voice to a profession that has been fighting for many years for acknowledgement whilst a gendered stereotypical view and discourse in society means that working with the youngest children is considered women's work and therefore subordinated.

A theoretical framework, emerging from the literature, is used to analyse the findings, including Whitty's (2008) and Oberhuemer's (2005) ideas of 'democratic professionalism'. The theoretical perspective, or the philosophical stance, informing the methodology of the research, is interpretive, or 'symbolic interactionism', which stems from the pragmatist philosopher and social psychologist George Herbert Mead (1934), and the sociologist Herbert Blumer (1969). The main research tool used is focus group interviews.

The main findings of the research reveal that the preschool teachers tend to focus on the *educational* dimension of their role where they see themselves as professionals and experts. All elements strengthening that dimension are perceived as 'positive'. They hardly mention the preschools' function of *social justice* and contextual factors related to the *economic* function, as the number of children in the groups (classes) and the children's long day in preschools are affecting their role and leadership in a 'negative' way and impacting on their professional identity. Leadership within preschools is mainly seen as traditional and the professional identities of Icelandic preschool teachers, or how they see themselves as professionals and leaders, are also affected by prevailing stereotypically gendered perceptions of some of the stakeholders. In fact they are barely differentiated from the laypersons who numerically dominate their field.

Dedication

To my grandfather, Þorsteinn Benediktsson, who constantly encouraged me to learn and taught me the meaning of resilience.

Acknowledgements

I first came to London to participate in the module on professionalism in the EdD International Programme in October 2004. I will never forget the moment when I was lying in my bed the first night in the old John Adams Hall, thinking: "What on earth am I doing here, a grandmother in my sixties who should rather be staying at home, baking for and playing with my grandchild". Afterwards you only remember the good things, although the journey has been tough and troublesome. During these almost eight years of my life I have got acquainted with some fantastic people that have taught me a lot, encouraged me and made my life richer. There I want to mention first my supervisor, Dr. Marianne Coleman, who always believed I would manage to finish the journey, and with her professional attitude and supervision supported me all the way. I also thank Liz Brooker for her remarkable work as a reader. Anne Gold and Charlie Owen, as course tutors, have been encouraging and helpful, and I am ever so grateful to my fellow students from all over the world for educating and enjoying communications.

I also want to thank very much the participants in the research, and my colleagues in the School of Education for their interest in my progress and for enlightening discussions along the way, not the least Hrönn and Steinunn Helga.

At last I want to thank my mother and my family for the support all those years, but also for the demands of being a daughter, mother, grandmother and supporting person, when they needed it. It helped me from 'get lost in researching'.

Most of all I thank the two men who lived with me and had to put up with me during this time, my youngest son, Vignir Örn Guðmundsson, who also transcribed some of the interviews, and especially my husband, Guðmundur Vignir Óskarsson, who never listens to whining and complaints and always sees the bright sides of life. What excuse can I invent now for not playing golf with him!

Declaration and word count

I hereby declare that, except where explicit attribution is made,
the work presented in this thesis is entirely my own.

Word count: 45,544

Reykjavík, July 2012

Arna H. Jónsdóttir

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Personal statement

In this statement the task is to provide a summary and synthesis of my learning experience over the EdD International Programme as a whole, make links between the elements of the programme, demonstrate how the programme has contributed to my professional development and knowledge, and indicate the international, intercultural or comparative dimensions of the thesis (EdD (International) Student Handbook, 2011-2012, p. 85).

By reflecting on my experience and learning in relation to this statement, I am going to evaluate my position as it is in the end of this almost eight years of study, involving all the issues above.

Why did I apply for the study?

In my application in July 2004 I explained that there were both personal and professional reasons for my application for the EdD International Programme. I had an ambition to widen my knowledge base and be better qualified in doing various types of research. I was also hoping for participation in an international, professional learning community with strong academics, teachers and students, where students were seen as creative and having a voice and the teachers were progressive in their teaching methods. I also hoped I could read a lot of literature about my subject of educational leadership. Another reason was related purely to my professional status, since there were discussions about amalgamation of The Iceland University of Education, where I was an assistant professor, and The University of Iceland, and within such a huge institution my position would become professionally stronger with a doctoral degree.

The reasons I did not mention in the application, but are probably the main motivators, are that I belong to a female profession which I feel is always downgraded in society, both because of gender and the status of the youngest citizens that the profession is teaching and taking care of. This profession needs to have well educated people to be its spokespersons and representatives within the academy and society.

Additionally, it was my personal ambition, having roots in my childhood, when I lived with my late grandparents who were born in 1898 and 1899, and got to know of the poor domestic conditions of their childhoods and their lack of educational opportunities. My grandfather, who I loved and honoured, encouraged me during my

school years in many ways, even with a 'carrot' when he thought it necessary, and his attitude is always with me.

My learning experience within the EdD International Programme

In this section I will focus on the learning process related to the professional learning community I was hoping for within the Institute of Education and address the other issues in later sections.

In 2006, in my Portfolio, I evaluated this professional learning community within the Institute, taking place in courses and research weeks, by saying the following: "I really like my international group, my fellow students. We have great informal theoretical and professional discussions outside the classroom, but I also like their activity in classroom's discussions. I can express myself freely in both situations and that is invaluable. I feel I have a voice." Most of the teachers were also attentive, some more critical than others but I did not always feel that they were very progressive in their teaching methods.

From the year 2006/2007 increasingly fewer students from my cohort attended the research weeks, which was a great disappointment to me, as I felt it was like my anchor to meet and discuss with my fellow students. When the bank system collapsed in Iceland 2008, and affected the financial situation of my family as it did with thousands of others, I did not manage to attend the research weeks as often as I would have liked and an important link to the learning community was thus missing.

Links between the elements of the programme

The EdD programme involves four taught courses, the Institutional Focused Study (IFS) and the thesis. I did not pursue one single line of enquiry through the programme and one reason is that the collaboration between me and my first supervisor in the study did not develop as intended. Our ideas about the research subject of the IFS did not match, and my second assignment, related to the second module, *Methodology 1*, which was the research plan for the IFS, ended by being a side-line. In the summer of 2005 I changed supervisors and Dr. Marianne Coleman became my new one.

When reflecting closely on the other taught courses, the IFS, the thesis, and my professional and academic progress I perceive certain connections and development.

In the first taught course on professionalism, the module I liked the most of these four, I gained a new understanding of familiar concepts such as *profession, professionalization, professional* and *professionalism* and saw the situation and

status of the Icelandic preschool teachers' profession from a different viewpoint. The first assignment, connected to this module, *The Professionalization of the Icelandic Preschool Teachers,* has really affected the progress of my study, and also my academic career and professional practice. When the assignment had been graded, I formed a focus group of some leading representatives in the Preschool Teachers' Union. I asked them to read the assignment and reflect on certain questions. In December 2005, a book, *Gender and Education* (Jónsdóttir, Helgadóttir and Þórðardóttir, 2005) where I was one of the editors, was published. There I wrote a chapter about the professionalization of the Icelandic preschool teachers in relation to gender (Jónsdóttir, 2005). In total I introduced the findings of the assignment and the focus group research in four presentations, both in Iceland and at the EECERA conference in Dublin, Ireland. Further, I was invited to be in charge of a new course on professionalism in the *International study* within the School of Education. There, and in other courses, I used the book chapter in my teaching.

In the third assignment, related to the third module, *Methodology 2*, I used a phenomenologically based interviewing technique (Seidman, 1998). The purpose was to try out the method and hopefully get some indications which I could build on in the IFS. There I felt that I got back on track after assignment 2. The participants in assignment 3 were two preschool directors and the topic was *Preschool Directors– Success and Adversities, Related to Life History*. There I got rather useful indications which I could partly build on when deciding finally on the research questions in my IFS, especially the following quotation which described the stance of both preschool head teachers:

> What happens in the staff group is always the most difficult part of the job, conflicts are hard and tiring and the turnover rate ... if the parents and kids were the only ones here the preschool would be heaven ... (Profile 2, 2005, p. 35, unpublished).

I introduced the findings of this research in three conferences, all in Iceland and one of them was the EECERA conference, held in Reykjavík 2006.

The subject of the IFS research, *The Preschool Head Teacher and Staff Related Problems: The Micropolitical Dimension*, was thus based on my previous research in the doctoral portfolio (Jónsdóttir, 2005a, b, c, d) which had revealed considerable power struggles within preschools. The IFS was a case study within one preschool, a delicate project, where I made some ethical mistakes, discussed them in the IFS report and learnt my lesson (see the thesis, section 3.3). I was dissatisfied with the feed-back comments I got on the IFS, as I thought they were rather pedantic and not focusing on the originality of the research. Despite these comments the contribution of the research to the preschool field, the head teachers and especially

group (class) leaders has been considerable and I will be pleased if the contribution of my thesis will be as influential. I wrote an article in Netla (Jónsdóttir, 2009), an online journal, published by the School of Education, University of Iceland, and later this year an article by me and Louise Hard (2006, 2008) from Australia will be published in the EECERA journal, built on our research findings. Further I am using the IFS in my teaching in the undergraduate and graduate study and I presented from the study nine times at conferences in Iceland, Norway and Denmark, as in courses within preschools. The findings of my IFS (Jónsdóttir, 2008, 2009) encouraged me to investigate the professional dimension of the role of preschool teachers in more depth (see chapter one).

This research and learning process I have described above is the basis which is informing my thesis.

The thesis, international, intercultural or comparative dimensions

The international dimension of the thesis is noticeable in the international literature and can especially be seen in the 'emergent analytical framework' (section 2.6.1). There I am referring to Icelandic, Nordic, European and other international research which are the basis for the analyzing of my findings. Further, by focusing on the preschool teachers' role, leadership and identities with gender perspective can be seen as having importance in international context.

In the research process my first aim was to use Whitty's (2008) evolutionary typology of professionalism (traditional, managerial, collaborative and democratic) as an analyzing framework, but as its roots are both English and from other school levels, I had much difficulty in adapting it to the preschools' female workforce and its circumstances. In democratic professionalism Oberhuemer (2005) has added the early childhood dimension and therefore it is more suitable as an analytical device in this research. Further, I have presented my EdD research findings at international conferences and collaborated with researchers in other countries related to my work.

Overall contribution to my professional development and knowledge

In this last section I will evaluate my position today, compared to my reasons and expectations when applying for the study and at the same time examine my learning process described above.

The work on the assignments, research projects, writings, presentations, my new courses and teaching within the School of Education, all connected to my study, have surely enhanced my professional and academic knowledge, competences and practice as a researcher and an assistant professor. For example, during my work

on the thesis I was offered to be in charge of a research project situated within the Centre of Research in Early Childhood Education, on *Professionalism of Preschool Teachers*.

To mention the most outstanding experiences and learning from the whole process is hard, but as often before I think I have learnt the most by my mistakes and 'critical incidents' (Cunningham, 2008) such as not being caring enough towards the participants in my IFS. Further, having the courage to change supervisor before doing my IFS was also a good and professional step forward. I have to say that Marianne Coleman's supervision of the IFS and the Thesis, with critical supportive comments, analyzing thoughts and reflections, enthusiasm and professional encouragement has been a huge learning opportunity for me. As a supervisor of M.Ed. dissertations I have used that knowledge when supervising my students, and I know I have grown in the supervisor's role, and I have tried to adopt her professional attitude, although not having my toes where she has her heels (an Icelandic figure of speech, of which I do not know the equivalent in English).

Overall I can state that I have read a lot of literature about my subject and have widened my knowledge base and am better qualified in doing various types of research. In relation to my research I have read an enormous quantity of articles and books on early childhood education, leadership, both traditional and distributed, feminism and gender, professionalism and identities. As an assistant professor I would have read some literature anyway but I am sure that I would only have accessed a small fraction of this collection. I have also tried out new research designs such as case study and focus group interviews which have added to my qualifications.

An additional reason mentioned in the beginning was related to my professional status within a restructured university, with the School of Education, as a new unit. This amalgamation has taken place in a very difficult period in the Icelandic society because of the recession, accompanied with cut-backs and structural changes. The profile of the early childhood department is still somewhat invisible within the university and both there and in society a spotlight is needed to enhance the status of preschool education, preschool teachers and their education. As a rather stubborn preschool teacher and feminist I will keep on being one of the professions' spokespersons, enhancing its deserved status and professional respect.

1. Introduction

At the heart of this thesis are *the professional roles, leadership and identities* of preschool teachers in Iceland. The perceptions of relevant stakeholders relating to roles and leadership are investigated, as are the contextual factors the preschool teachers perceive as affecting their roles and leadership. Further, the thesis explores how these perceptions and factors appear to affect the *professional identities* of the preschool teachers.

The motivation for choosing the subject is, on one hand, my continuing experience in the field of preschools[1], as a former preschool teacher, preschool head teacher, pedagogical consultant, vice president of the Preschool Teachers' Union, and currently working as an assistant professor in the University of Iceland, School of Education. In these positions I have repeatedly worked with problems and issues that touch dimensions of *professionalism, professional roles*, *leadership* and *identities*. By focusing on the *ideology* embedded in the professional role of preschool teachers, recent research findings (Einarsdóttir, 2003; Jónsdóttir, 2005c) show that they have been insecure about their role and whether they should emphasise the caring or the teaching aspect of it. I want to explore this dilemma further and shed light on the potential differences in the preschool teachers and other stakeholders' views. Further, perceptions of roles are connected to attitudes and assumptions about the *value* or *status* of the profession (Cable and Miller, 2008) and a dilemma is likely to be connected to how preschool teachers value themselves as leading professionals, and how other stakeholders perceive them as professionals and leaders.

On the other hand, my interest in the concept of professionalism and professional roles has been enhanced through the research process within the EdD International Programme, and focussed through material on professionalism in some of the assignments in my portfolio. In particular the findings of my Institution Focused Study (Jónsdóttir, 2008) encouraged me to investigate the professional dimension of the role of preschool teachers in more depth. There the findings revealed e.g. that the preschool teachers placed lowest in the hierarchical structure within the preschool perceived that their participation in decision making was not asked for

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[1] I will be using the concepts *preschool* and *preschool teacher* as is done in the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture's translation of the Preschool Act (no. 90/2008), when the situation and context in Iceland is described, although the direct translation of the Icelandic concept *leikskóli* is *playschool*. The playschools, or preschools, are for children up to five years old.

and thus, decision making was not seen as part of their expertise (Jónsdóttir, 2008, 2009). It is debatable if a professional in this position is capable of seeing her or himself as a leading professional within the preschool and society, and also, if the expertise of preschool teachers is fully utilized within the preschools to strengthen children's education.

There is also a gender dimension to this study, discussed further in chapter 2, as preschool teachers, as a female profession, are simply less likely to be seen as professional because of their gender and seem to have to fight for their acknowledgement as a professional workforce.

The individuals who are the focus of this research are group (class) leaders and preschool teachers within preschools. The reason for choosing those groups, but not for example preschool head- and assistant head teachers, is that the voices of those lower in hierarchy are not as often heard. Performing research that will give the profession a voice is of great importance to me, as a professional and a feminist, and this has been a major motivator through my career. The purpose of the research is thus both educational and political.

1.1 The concepts: professional roles; identities and leadership

In this section, I will discuss the definitions of the relevant central concepts used in this research, i.e. *professional roles*, *leadership* and *identities*.

Castells (1997) has discussed the difference between roles and identities. He argues that *roles* are defined by norms structured by the institutions and organisations of society. The relative weight of roles in influencing people's behaviour depends upon negotiations and arrangements between individuals and those institutions and organisations. *Identities*, according to Castells (1997) are, on the other hand, sources of meaning for the actors themselves, and by themselves, constructed through the process of individuation (1997, p. 6). Therefore "identities organise the meaning whereas roles organise the functions" (Sachs, 2003, p. 126).

Professional roles of preschool teachers are thus the functions embedded in their work for which they are professionally accountable (Pound, 2008), to children, parents, other professionals and practitioners, neighbourhood and society. Teacher *identity* is not necessarily synonymous with her or his role or functions which are assigned as part of the job and may be outside the individual's control. On the other hand, identity is constructed by the individual who carries out the role, based on her or his values, beliefs, attitudes, feelings and understanding, and on personal history, ethnicity, gender and culture (Forde, McMahon, McPhee and Patrick, 2006).

When it comes to the concept *leadership* of preschool teachers my focus will be twofold. On one hand it will be on the functions and identities of those in formal positional roles of group (class) leaders, or middle leaders, and their placement within the formal hierarchy of the preschools and on the other hand on preschool teachers in general as leading partners of parents and colleagues within the preschools, as is confirmed in the Preschool Act (no. 90/2008). In more recent discussion on positional leadership, the emphasis has moved from focusing on one leader at the top as responsible for development and success, towards 'teachers as leaders' (Barth, 2001; Harris, 2005, 2008; Harris and Muijs, 2004; Lambert, 2006; York-Barr and Duke, 2004), and leadership ideas emphasising that "[s]chool leadership has a greater influence on schools and pupils when it is widely distributed" (Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins, 2008, p. 34). This emphasis is in accordance with viewing preschool teachers in general as leading professionals within the field.

The definitions above of *roles*, *identities* and *leadership* will be used, through relevant literature, to analyse the findings of the research.

As in all countries Icelandic preschool teachers are affected by some contextual factors which can both be 'home-made' and international and in the next section these factors will be discussed.

1.2 Contextual factors

As is well known in the international context since the Icelandic bank system collapsed in 2008, there has been a deep financial crisis in Iceland and therefore the economic circumstances of many families and children have changed dramatically in recent years. Before the collapse there was a huge economic expansion, which has been called the 'greediness urge' (Óskarsdóttir, 2009). During that period 'modern Vikings', mainly male, were expanding their activities, buying banks and firms throughout the world, bringing about consequences that the Icelandic public is now paying for. The functions of the preschools were affected as were those of other institutions in the society. During the period of expansion, untrained staff and some preschool teachers left the preschools because of better paid jobs elsewhere; there was a shortage of staff and constant staff turnover. The staff were required to work overtime to keep the preschools open so parents could go to work and means found beside the formal wage contracts to keep the staff satisfied. The cut backs that followed, associated with the recession, aimed at cutting down meetings and all extra cost and salaries of staff, as well as project leaders' and replacement positions, and assistant head teachers' positions in some

municipalities. The preschools were instead able to hire unemployed professionals, such as primary school teachers and social workers, who were unable to get a job in their own field. In the wake of the collapse people talk about emphasising the 'old' values' such as honesty, respect, equality, justice and responsibility (Þjóðfundur, 2009).

In the following sections additional elements or factors that can be expected to affect the professional roles, leadership and identities of the Icelandic preschool teachers, are discussed. These factors can all be connected to the policy of governments and municipalities, i.e. the placement of early childhood education within governmental systems, curriculum and frameworks, the education of professionals, the situation of parents and children in Iceland and the preschools' workforce.

Iceland is situated between two continents, Europe and America, and emphasis can be noticed from them both, but social and educational influence can though be especially related to the Nordic countries (Wagner and Einarsdóttir, 2006).

1.2.1 The responsibility for early childhood education within governmental systems

When locating early childhood education within governmental systems, ideological differences occur and mirror how preschool activity is seen and understood differently in countries around the world. The main ideology establishes itself in either split or integrated systems (Bennett, 2003). In the beginning of this section those different systems will be discussed before turning to the Icelandic situation.

The majority of EU states have systems of split ministerial responsibility, with services for children from three or four years old up to compulsory school within the Education Departments but those for the younger children under Social Affairs, Family Affairs, Health or Gender Equity Departments (Lloyd and Hallet, 2010; Oberhuemer, 2008). In England, however, there have been some changes in the early childhood education system recently towards more integration (see Department for Education and Skills, 2003, 2004), and the service is now placed within the Department for Education. Bennett (2003) argues that the prevailing division between education and care for young children has its roots as far back as the late 19th century. Kindergartens sprung from the work of inspired educators while day-care was developed from charitable initiatives, with special emphasis on disadvantaged children; the former was rather connected to education and the

school system (e.g. preschools, infant schools), the latter to the social, health and welfare framework (see also Neuman, 2005).

In the OECD (2001, 2006) reports the Nordic countries were seen as exceptions regarding integrated systems, initiating early childhood policy under one ministry, bringing together education and care within their institutions for children under compulsory school age.

The Icelandic preschool

In Iceland, the Women's Alliance in Reykjavík opened the first full-time day-care centre for poor children in the 1920s. In 1940 a new part-time program, called playschool, was established (Barnavinafélagið Sumargjöf, 1974). This division into playschools and day-care centres lasted until 1991; playschools were part-time education, usually four hours daily, for children from two to five years old from all social groups, while day-care centres were full-day care and education for children from six months old, of single parents, students and socially disadvantaged families. However, all the service was from the beginning placed within the Ministry of Education. In accordance with the circumstances of the children there were different adult-child ratios in the children's groups. The ratio in playschools was higher and there was also less space allocated for each child. Further, the functions of the institutions were partly different and can be connected to Bennett's (2003) definitions above on division of education and care. In an old textbook from 1952 by Valborg Sigurðardóttir, the first head of the Preschool Teachers' College, those functions are discussed:

> The day-care centres provide the children with food and care all day long, to help the homes which are the most suffering and unable to bring up the children, while those who can offer their children better circumstances take their children to playschools. ... No child with normal circumstances should be sent to day-care centre. They should only be used in emergency situation by the inhabitants of the city (Sigurðardóttir, 1952, p. 4).

With the Preschool Act of 1991 (no. 48) *playschool* (here called preschool) became the synonym for all early childhood education institutions in Iceland and in the Preschool Act from 1994 (no. 78), it was defined as the first level of the educational system and the job-title of the professional became *playschool teacher* (here called preschool teacher) instead of 'fóstra' or *substitute mother* (exact translation), or somebody who cares for you when your mother is not present. According to Einarsdóttir (1991) and Jóhannsdóttir (1992) municipalities in Iceland, who are running the preschools, have purposefully since 1987 been integrating the educational system and programmes for all children. Part-time preschools and

whole day-care institutions have been amalgamated, accompanied with the aim of social and ideological integration of education and care. In the latest Preschool Act (90/2008) the integration is confirmed in article 1 as follows: "[T]he preschool undertakes at the request of parents, the upbringing, caring and education of children of preschool age".

As noted above, responsibility for early childhood education is located within different government departments and different ideological systems in different countries. In Iceland the preschool is the first level in the educational system and education, upbringing and care are supposed to be interwoven within all preschools for children up to five years old, similar to other Nordic countries. The placement within governmental systems and the ideology it is built on affects the content of the preschool curriculum and frameworks and thus roles and identities of the preschool teachers.

1.2.2 Icelandic preschool curriculum and frameworks

The Ministry of Education in Iceland published the first guidelines for preschools in 1985 and the National Curriculum Guide for Preschools in 1999, which is meant to be a flexible frame for each preschool to develop its own educational plan and evaluation methods (Menntamálaráðuneytið, 1999). In 2011, the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture published new national curricula for all school levels where there were six basic common areas: literacy, sustainable development, health and wellbeing, democracy and human rights, equality, and creativity. These basic areas are meant to be interwoven in all learning at all school levels, according to their characteristics, activities and methods (see Mennta- og menningarmálaráðuneytið, 2011). This emphasis strengthens still more the educational role of the preschool and its connection to other school levels.

Every Preschool Act is followed by a Regulation which lays down more details e.g. about preschool premises and facilities, housing and accommodation. In the Regulation from 1995, and additions from 2001 and 2002, there are stipulations of less space in square meters for each child in preschool which means increasing the number of children within groups. In the most recent Regulation on preschool settings (2009) all minimum requirements on the adult-child ratios and minimum space for each child are gone and authority is now in the hands of the preschool head teachers and municipalities. At the same time there is a stipulation in the same Regulation that it is desirable that the day in preschool for each child should not be more than nine hours. Since 2009 some municipalities have agreed that parents

should pay more for the ninth hour, thus trying to shorten the children's time in the preschools, and simultaneously cutting down the cost of running them.

1.2.3 Education of Icelandic preschool teachers

In Iceland the Government has gradually raised educational demands for preschool teachers' education and changes in the placement, structure and content have been fast. In 1973 the Icelandic College for Preschool Teachers became a part of the State education system. The University of Akureyri established a B.Ed. degree for preschool teachers in 1996 and in December 1997 the Icelandic College for Preschool Teachers amalgamated with three other schools: The Iceland Training College of Physical Education, the Icelandic School of Social Education and the Iceland University of Education, which became the name of the united university. Since 1998 preschool teachers have all graduated with a university degree (B.Ed.). The Preschool Teachers' Union fought a long and intense battle and "a dream came true" when it was decided that their education should take place within universities and joining up with the other institutions was also on the agenda. To stress the connection to other school levels, the Preschool Teachers' Union became a member of the Icelandic Teachers' Union in 2001.

Since the preschool teachers' education moved into the universities, the preschool teachers' educators within the universities have been fighting for the primacy of the ideology of early childhood education, against the formal and informal ruling and control of the primary school-based ideology and teaching methods. There, Johansson's (2006) findings have been a guiding light with his warnings about unification of the preschool and primary school education within universities because of the danger that "preschool teaching might disappear as a well-defined professional competence" (2006, p. 44). Johansson argues that the Nordic preschool model is directly threatened with the emphasis on school subjects instead of care, aesthetics and creative art.

In 2008 the Parliament decided that all teachers and head teachers, at all school levels in Iceland, should complete an M.Ed. degree to get their licence (Act on the Education and Recruitment of Teachers and Head Teachers in Pre-School, Compulsory School and Upper Secondary School (no. 87/2008). Further, preschool teachers who are specialists in the education of the older children in preschools can apply for licence to teach 6-8 years old children within primary schools, and primary school teachers who are specialists in teaching younger children can apply for licence for teaching the older children in preschools. The stipulation on the five years M.Ed. study is a huge change for Icelandic preschool teachers and many of

them, and other stakeholders, are worried about the consequences and fear that there will be constantly fewer applicants for preschool teacher education in the future. Some politicians, preschool teachers and teacher educators have been totally against this change.

Enrolment into preschool teacher education has at least temporarily gone down but it is worth considering whether the connection to the teaching force in general will appeal to new applicants or scare them away. At least, the salaries of preschool and primary school teachers in Iceland are similar, which can be seen as potentially strengthening recruitment into preschools.

1.2.4 Parents and children in Iceland

The parents of preschool children seem very satisfied with the Icelandic preschools, the education, the staff and the activities. In 2009 about 95.3% of parents in Reykjavík's preschools were overall satisfied with the preschools (Reykjavíkurborg, Leikskólasvið, 2009).

In the Preschool Act (90/2008) there are some new articles, e.g. about having a parent council in each preschool. The role of the parent council is to express opinions to the preschool and to a special preschool committee, elected by the local authorities, on the preschool curriculum guide and other plans for preschool operations. The council is also supposed to inspect the implementation of the school curriculum guide and other plans within the preschool, as well as the presentation thereof to parents. Thus, the parents have more formal authority than before and it is interesting to see how the parents are going to use that power.

It is also relevant to look at information about the life situation of parents and children in Iceland from 1991 to 2009. Icelandic men have always worked a long day but the effects of the recession are becoming obvious. The average number of working hours of men decreased from 51.3 hours in 1991 to 43.8 hours in 2009 while the average number of working hours of women was rather stable, at around 35 hours. In 1991 the activity rate of women in Iceland was 74.6%, where 51.6% were working full-time and 48.4% part-time, but 2009 the activity rate of women went up to 77.1%, where 63.1% were working full-time and 36.9% part-time. The total unemployment rate of men and women 2009 was 7.2% which is the highest level of unemployment since 1991 (Statistics Iceland, 2010a).

As the number of full-time working mothers has increased, the percentage of young children (1-3 years old) in preschools is constantly rising and at the same time the daily attendance of all age groups is increasing. The rise of percentage of

children 1 to 3 years old in preschools between the years 2000 and 2009 (Statistics Iceland, 2010b) can be seen in Table 1.1:

Table 1.1. Percentage of each age group of children attending preschools

	2000	**2009**
One year old	10%	38.5%
Two years old	55%	94%
Three years old	87%	97%
Four years old	94%	95.6%
Five years old	93%	96%

According to Statistical Iceland (2010b) the daily attendance continues to increase as can be seen in Table 1.2:

Table 1.2. Children's length of day in preschools.

	2000	**2009**
7 hours and more	54.2%	88.5%
6 hours	14.7%	6.6%
4 and 5 hours	44%	11%

Júlíusdóttir (2001) talks about 'cultural mismatch' when the material development of the society is somehow faster than the development of individual and family values, customs and view of life, among them attitudes towards children. An example of this is the Icelandic habit of working long hours while many nations in Europe have shortened the working week. Research findings on stress and conflicts between family and work (Stefánsson, 2008) show that those conflicts seem to be greater in Iceland than in other Western countries. Eydal (2006) argues that Icelandic circumstances, such as high participation in the labour market, long working days of parents and relatively high birth rate, demand a special Icelandic family policy.

The life situation of Icelandic families, the age composition and the length of children's day in preschools are likely to be factors affecting the roles, leadership

and identities of preschool teachers. Their situation will be explained further in the next section.

1.2.5 The workforce in Icelandic preschools

Within Icelandic preschools, the preschool teachers are positioned in different formal roles with different job descriptions and different levels of authority: preschool head teacher, assistant head teacher, group (class) leader, preschool teacher, special teacher and project leader (Kennarasamband Íslands, 2010). 'Ordinary' preschool teachers in the lowest level of the formal hierarchy are about 24% of preschool teachers within the preschools (Statistics Iceland, 2010b). The reality of the Icelandic preschools is that qualified preschool teachers are a minority, or about 34% of the staff working with the children. Thus, a great majority of staff working directly with the children are assistant teachers. In comparison, a total of 91.2% of teaching staff in Icelandic compulsory schools (for students aged 6-16) hold a teaching licence and in Reykjavik the percentage is 97.3% (Statistics Iceland, 2010c). When compared to other Nordic countries, university trained preschool teachers form approximately a third (Finland and Norway) or half (Sweden) or 60% (Denmark) of the staff in the preschools (Moss, 2006). In Iceland the percentage of preschool teachers working directly with children should be at least 66.6% according to the Preschool Act (90/2008).

The turnover rate of staff in Icelandic preschools between the years 2007 and 2008 was 28.3%, and was greatest among untrained staff (Statistic Iceland, 2010b). In comparison the turnover rate in compulsory schools between the years 2007 and 2008 was 17.3% of teaching staff members (Statistic Iceland, 2010c). Between the years 2008 and 2009 the turnover rate in preschools was the lowest since Statistics Iceland began to publish those figures. In addition, more staff members work full-time and fewer of them work on a part-time basis. These numbers reveal that because of the difficult situation in the labour market, the staff are choosing to stay in the preschools (Statistics Iceland, 2010b). Controversially, the recession has had positive effects on preschool education in this respect.

As I have now considered Icelandic contextual factors possibly affecting professional roles, leadership and identities of preschool teachers, I will return to the purpose of the research and identify the research questions.

1.3 Purpose and research questions

As mentioned in the beginning of the thesis, the purpose of the research is both educational and political. Preschool teachers, as a female profession, have been

fighting through the years for the acknowledgement of their expertise and professional role, but the gendered stereotypical view and discourse in the society reveals that working with the youngest children is considered as women's work (Cameron, 2001) and therefore subordinated. By carrying out this research I am giving the profession a voice to express their views and perceptions of their professional roles and leadership and further, try to understand if and how stakeholders' perceptions are affecting the preschool teachers' identities. Hopefully, the findings will be of use in debating, both inside and outside preschools, about the professional role and leadership of preschool teachers and thus improving preschool education, and will at the same time draw attention to the role of preschools in society.

Until now I have been researching within preschools but the findings of my former research indicated that it was time to step out and interview other stakeholders as well to get the broader picture. The relevant stakeholders in this research are preschool teachers in all positions and other staff within the preschools, but also parents and representatives of the local authorities and politicians. Although it can be argued that the children are the most important stakeholders in the preschools, my focus is on those influencing children's lives, or the relevant adults. My research has been in the field of management and leadership and there my academic expertise is embedded.

Built on the purpose, the research questions are as follows:

1. How are the professional role and leadership of preschool teachers currently perceived by them and by other stakeholders in preschool education in Iceland?
2. What contextual factors are currently perceived by preschool teachers to be affecting their professional role and leadership?
3. How do the preschool teachers see their professional identity and how do stakeholders' current perceptions of their role and leadership, and relevant contextual factors, appear to affect their professional identity?

To answer these questions, I gathered data by interviewing focus groups of preschool teachers and relevant stakeholders in one municipality in Iceland. Focus groups seemed appropriate for exploring how the stakeholders' points of view are constructed and expressed (Barbour and Kitzinger, 1999). In a focus group interview, the researcher can probe for deeper understanding than is possible with questionnaires (Flick, 2006) and the group interaction created through a focus group interview produces data that might not be available through one-on-one interviews

(Morgan, 1997). I also interviewed individually two local politicians in the relevant early childhood committee about their policy and emphases.

In the next chapter I will review the international literature and cross-national research on roles, professionalism, leadership and identities of professionals with reference to preschools. The third chapter explains the methodology of the research. The findings are presented and analysed in the fourth chapter, leading to conclusions and recommendations.

2. Literature review

As the focus of the research is on professional roles, leadership and identities of Icelandic preschool teachers, the discussion first centres on the main ideological perspectives informing the roles. There I am referring to the main perspectives on childhood and how the role of preschools is seen in society, especially in Nordic countries. I will also discuss how there has been a re-conceptualisation of the educational emphasis informing the roles. As *professionalism* is at the heart of the professional role I will then discuss this concept and the influential factors concentrating on democratic professionalism (Oberhuemer, 2005; Whitty, 2008) where there is a comprehensive approach to professionalism, involving work with children, the knowledge base of the preschool teachers, partnership with parents and leadership within early childhood institutions. In the leadership section the focus will primarily be on distributed and teacher leadership, and in line with the focus of the research, preschool teachers as leading professionals. In the section on professional identity I explain what research findings reveal about influential factors and how identities are shaped, among other things focusing on gender and gendered discourses. In the summary I provide an emerging analytical framework indicating the importance of democratic professionalism and research findings related to preschool teachers' roles, leadership and identities and how they are integrated.

2.1 Childhoods and functions of preschools

In the beginning of the section I will outline three main functions of preschool in societies as they are most likely to impact on the view of preschool teachers and other stakeholders of the preschool and thus guide their actions and behaviours. Then two main perspectives on childhood will be discussed considering how they may affect the work of preschools, and finally Icelandic and other research which informs functions and behaviours embedded in the roles of Icelandic preschool teachers will be considered.

According to Vandenbroeck, Coussée and Bradt (2010), early childhood education fulfils several functions in societies. It fulfils an *economic* function, enabling parents to reconcile their parental responsibilities with the labour market, and nation states to thrive in the global market. There, questions about the length of the day for children in preschool, because of their parents' working hours, are of relevance. A second function of preschool is *educational*; concerning individual and

social development, where beliefs of what educational outcomes need to be pursued may vary among professionals as well as parents. Different opinions can include underlining more free play and social competence versus more school-like activities. The third function is related to *social justice*, or how early childhood education may diminish obvious inequalities or unjust situations. Vandenbroeck's (2009) understanding of *social justice* is established in respect of diversity and social inclusion. There he is talking about ethnicity, culture, religion, gender, family composition, class or social backgrounds, the inclusion of children labelled as having special needs and all other forms of diversity. He argues that although diversity is still denied in some places, in general, the early childhood community today cannot reasonably claim to focus on the 'average' child anymore. According to Vandenbroeck *et al.* (2010) these three functions are inevitably in tension with each other and they argue that "harmonious compromises between them are probably never to be achieved" (2010, p. 149).

Additionally, some views on childhood can be seen as motivating factors when governments are defining curriculum frameworks, focusing on the educational function and function of social justice, and thus affecting the professional role and leadership of preschool teachers. The content and emphases in the education of preschool teachers, the policy of the preschool teachers' union and discourses of other stakeholders, can further be viewed through these different lenses.

Kristjánsson (2006, p. 20), who has undertaken childhood research within Nordic countries, argues that childhood can in general be valued on the basis of two loosely related perspectives. The first one he calls the *prospective value* and the second one the *here-and-now* perspective. The *prospective value* focuses on the significance of childhood on the basis of its future value and on minimising 'bad' effects as early as possible, and is pragmatic rather than emotional. It can be legitimate, or even desirable, to "fiddle with the clock of childhood" and thus try to speed up the tempo in which children acquire adult-like skills (Kristjánsson, 2006, p. 20, quoting Elkind, 1981). Kristjánsson's (2006, p. 21) *here and now perspective* finds support in research based on attachment psychology, according to which positive affective feelings and active interest in the child are instrumental in establishing intimate human bonds and in promoting secure attachment (Bowlby, 1978). The here-and-now perspective romanticises childhood, valuing children and childhood for their own sake. Interaction with peers and peer-play activities are viewed as developmentally important and equal to or better than instruction from adults, at least for very young children. Children should not be rushed through childhood but "should be allowed to be children as long as they need to"

(Kristjánsson, 2006, p. 21). Although Kristjánsson (2006) argues that the *here and now* perspective is especially appropriate at society´s *micro* level, in interaction between children and adults, the Nordic countries' public child-centeredness bears witness to a positive appraisal of childhood in its own right (2006, p. 22).

Further, those two perspectives described by Kristjánsson (2006) can be related to the discourse of 'the child in need' and 'the rich child' (Moss, Dillon and Statham, 2000). Based on their research, Moss *et al.* (2000) argue that the former concept has been dominant in British social work discourse, policy and practice, especially in 'sponsored' provision for children under three, while the latter is used to characterize the ideology and work in Reggio Emilia. Further the discourse in Reggio Emilia is focusing on 'children with special rights', but not 'children at risk' or 'children with special needs'. Woodhead (2008) states that when adults make claims for children in terms of 'meeting needs', the children's dependencies are emphasised.

Kristjánsson's (2006) perspectives can also be related to the discourses of the concepts of the child as 'being' and 'becoming'. According to Uprichard (2008), quoting many researchers, "the 'being' child is seen as a social actor in his or her own right, who is actively constructing his or her own 'childhood', and who has views and experiences about being a child; the 'becoming' child is seen as an 'adult in the making', who is lacking universal skills and features of the 'adult' that they will become" (2008, p. 304). Uprichard (2008) though argues, based on her interviews with 300 children, aged 4-12 years old, that it is appropriate to consider these discourses together, and not necessarily as conflicting, but as ones that complement one another. Moreover, she argues that perceiving "children as 'being and becoming' does not decrease children's agency, but increases it, as the onus of their agency is in both the present and future" (Uprichard, 2008, p. 311).

In the next section consideration is given to if and how those two main perspectives on childhood inform the ideology of the Nordic and Icelandic preschools and thus affect the professional roles of Icelandic preschool teachers.

2.1.1 Ideology of Nordic and Icelandic preschools

According to Wagner (2006), who studies early childhood education in the Nordic countries and USA, Nordic people proudly lay claim to a distinctive, shared ideology about children and childhood "including such cherished cornerstones as egalitarianism, emancipation, democracy, compromise, solidarity, and the concept of the good childhood" (Wagner and Einarsdóttir, 2006, p. 2). Although Nordic people want to safeguard the ideology of the *good childhood*, some researchers

have pointed out that the ideology is not sufficient when it concerns newcomers, immigrant children, socially endangered children and children at risk. According to Wagner (2006), *solidarity* may be working against non-Nordic newcomers. Research findings from 10 primary schools in Denmark revealed that minority children were neither warmly welcomed nor broadly rejected by their peers from the ethnic majority group (Wagner, Camparo, Tsenkova and Camparo, 2008). Further, Jensen (2009) argues that emphasis on participation, democracy, autonomy, freedom, and acting as agents in their own learning process, requires a lot from children and could be difficult for those who are socially endangered. Thus, it seems difficult to interweave the *here-and-now* perspective and the *prospective value*, the *educational* function and the function of *social justice*.

Recent research findings within Icelandic preschools reveal that the so-called social pedagogy approach is favoured (Einarsdóttir, 2006). In the social pedagogy tradition the focus is on the whole child, bringing together education, upbringing and care. Rather than focusing on academic skills preparing children for school, the education is seen as broad preparation for life (Bennett, 2003, 2005; OECD, 2006), which "gives early childhood education centres a particular and broad identity, which*, inter alia,* differentiates them from schools" (Bennett, 2005, p. 16). Historically, as Bennett (2005) argues, group sizes and adult-child ratios have been relatively smaller in this tradition than the more school-like pre-primary tradition, allowing for better quality interaction, and more autonomy for children. Einarsdóttir's (2006) findings on ideology and methods in early childhood education further indicate that a large proportion of a typical Icelandic preschool day is devoted to free play with peers, outside or inside, and child-initiated activities (more than 50%) which establish the ideology of the *good childhood*. Only a small part of the day is devoted to pre-planned activities or group work. Further, Icelandic preschool teachers think that the child's happiness and well-being (Hreinsdóttir, 2009; Karlsdóttir and Einarsdóttir, 2004), social skills and satisfying interpersonal relationships, are very important.

A similar view is also evident in Einarsdóttir´s (2008) findings among Icelandic parents and children on the role of preschool. The parents saw the preschool as a significant part of children's education and life-long learning. Both groups viewed playing and outdoor activities as an important part of preschool life, and many of the children valued having freedom to choose what to do. They disliked being forced into passive activities where they must sit still and be quiet. Both children and their parents were generally satisfied with the preschool's emphasis on social interaction, independence, and play. Only a few parents mentioned that they wanted more

formal education or a more academic focus in preschool or to push the primary school curriculum downwards. According to Einarsdóttir (2008), "this is in considerable agreement with Nordic ECE tradition and research in the other Nordic countries … where the social pedagogy approach is respected and practiced" (2008, p. 290).

However, in the Nordic countries there appears to be a tendency to change the emphasis in curricula towards more 'schoolification'. According to Thoresen (2009, quoting Telhaug, 2009) there are internal dilemmas or tensions embedded in the new preschool law and curriculum for Norwegian preschools. Preschools are supposed to support children's curiosity and creativity and build on their interest, knowledge and competences. At the same time they are supposed to teach children about basic subjects and how to participate in a democratic society. If the perspective becomes more future-oriented, the here-and-now perspective will be lost, and as Thoresen (2009, p. 131) asks: "[W]hat will become of the childhood in its own right"? Pramling Samuelson and Sheridan's (2010) view is that instead of adapting school subjects for the early years in Sweden, a special pedagogy for young children needs to be developed. Jensen, Broström and Hansen (2010) argue that many decisions made by the municipal authorities in Denmark might move the educational practice away from the Nordic model and towards 'schoolification'. They mention especially language acquisition, early literacy and the so-called screening for language deficits, which is obligatory in Danish preschools, and which they see as heavily affected by recent policy on curriculum improvement, standardised testing and 'what works'. Jensen *et al.* (2010) recommend a theoretical and practical approach that further develops the strengths of the social pedagogy approach, while answering the challenge of globalization. Additionally, Broström (2006) argues that it is necessary that a broad educational concept releases early childhood education in Denmark "from being bound to only developmental psychology and the child's unbalanced self-governing activity" (2006, p. 406).

It seems clear from the writings and research quoted above that the social pedagogy approach, the here-and-now perspective and the ideology of the good childhood seems to be in conflict with the prospective value, 'schoolification', technicality and 'what works' within the Nordic countries. Additionally, both Broström (2006) and Lenz Taguchi (2006) argue, a new understanding of the *good childhood* is needed within preschools in resistance to the growing technology of developmentality. There Broström (2006) talks about a broad educational concept and Lenz Taguchi (2006) "practice of an ethic of resistance".

2.1.2 Roles of Icelandic preschool teachers

In recent years Icelandic preschool teachers have sensed a certain dilemma because of their changed *educational* role and seem to be insecure about whether to emphasise the caring or the teaching aspect of their work (Einarsdóttir, 2003). This can probably be connected to the definition of the preschool as the first school level in Iceland in 1994, the changing of their job title to preschool teacher, underlining the teaching aspect of their work more clearly, as does the emphasis in the National Curriculum Guide for Preschools (Menntamálaráðuneytið, 1999) on certain learning areas such as motor development, language development, artistic creation, nature and the environment, and culture and society. Additionally, my findings (Jónsdóttir, 2005c) reveal that preschool teachers have been fighting for a higher status and acknowledgement by separating themselves from the 'non-professionals' within the preschools, 'reaching up' to the primary school teachers in relation to wages and partly in relation to the professional role. In that context the preschool teachers have gradually adopted the primary school teachers' vocabulary, as is the policy of the Preschool Teachers' Union, talking for example about *teaching pupils* instead of *working with children*. At the same time, the preschool teachers have been eager to maintain the methods characterising early childhood education and to preserve play as the main learning method.

According to Einarsdóttir (2006, 2008) the preschool teachers seem to be divided into several camps regarding the proper *educational* role of the preschool (Vandenbroeck *et al*. 2010), which obviously affects how they see and perform their own role. One camp, the most traditional, emphasises the role of preschool as providing care, emotional and social support, and the preschool years as the golden age of free play and development. There it seems that the Nordic child-centeredness, the good childhood and developmental psychology play an important role. Einarsdóttir's (2006, 2008) second camp emphasises preschool as the first level of formal education, where adults are teachers (not caregivers), whose job is to ensure that children learn what they need to learn even at this age. There the prospective value seems to be prevailing with its emphasis on academic skills and learning areas. Einarsdóttir's (2006, 2008) third camp argues that care giving and teaching within a play-based learning environment are mutually inclusive concepts, as in the social pedagogy approach, both necessary to ensure high-quality experience and outcomes for Icelandic children prior to their entrance into formal schooling at age six.

As Oberhuemer (2005) argues, professionalism is at the heart of the professional role of every preschool teacher. In the next section I will consider the concept of

professionalism and factors affecting it and thus the professional roles of preschool teachers. Then I turn to what has been labelled 'democratic professionalism' (Oberhuemer, 2005; Whitty, 2008) which provides a comprehensive approach to professionalism, professional role and leadership and is therefore particularly relevant to this thesis.

2.2 The concept professionalism and affecting factors

The concept *professionalism* is often used as if everybody has the same or similar understanding of its meaning, but the definition within the literature varies. According to Oberhuemer (2005, p. 138), definitions of professionalism, or to act professionally, are linked to value-based assumptions about what constitutes 'quality of action' in a particular occupational field. Further Oberhuemer (2008) explains in relation to early years that:

> Professionalism is seen as a situated concept, and reaching agreement on appropriate professional dispositions for work with young children, or what is required professional knowledge, or what are desired professional skills, is viewed as an ongoing, collaborative and interpretative act informed by our current understanding of childhood, parenthood, participation, learning, and the societal and educational role of early childhood centres (Oberhuemer, 2008, p. 139).

The understanding of professionalism as a phenomenon is thus related to social, cultural and historical contexts in every country and therefore influenced "by political and ideological consideration and discourses, individual and collective values and beliefs, views of childhood, pedagogy and learning, and views of the child and the role of parents" (Cable and Miller, 2008, p. 171). The understanding can thus touch upon the three functions of preschools, defined by Vandenbroeck *et al.* (2010). Although it is difficult to find an absolute definition of the concept, Cable and Miller (2008) mention common themes underpinning notions of professionalism, i.e. quality, standards, expertise, reflection, identity, and social status. As Urban and Dalli (2008) argue, professionalism "can be understood as a discourse as much as a phenomenon: as something that is constantly under re-construction" (p. 132). The definition can thus be different from one time or place to another, mirroring the community context.

Factors affecting professionalism and professional roles

According to McCulloch *et al.* (2000), the school curriculum remains a crucial site of contestation in the battle to define the nature of teacher professionalism. Whitty (2008) argues that the teaching profession in England experienced a considerable degree of autonomy from the 1950s until the mid-1970s. This period is sometimes talked about as the "Golden Age" of the teaching profession (McCulloch, 2001) and

categorised as the *traditional professionalism* of teachers (Whitty, 2008). The teachers had the freedom to choose what to teach and how to teach, and they had responsibility for curriculum development and innovations. As more recent research findings in English schools show, teachers felt their autonomy limited by the prescribed National Curriculum from 1988, accompanied by an assessment system, greater accountability and increased surveillance by the state (Whitty, 2008). These changes have been connected to the concept of *managerial professionalism*, where the professionalism of teachers was strongly affected by the English government (Whitty, 2008). The consequences are described as the de-professionalization of the teaching profession in England (e.g. McCulloch, 2001; Hargreaves, 2000).

In many countries preschool teachers perceive that their professionalism is threatened by the regulatory gaze and technical de-professionalising constraints (Dalli, 2008; Fenech, Sumsion, Robertson and Goodfellow, 2008; Osgood, 2006; Urban, 2008; Woodrow, 2008). Icelandic preschool teachers have sensed that they have been autonomous and in control regarding the emphasis on the children's education, planning and practice, and that the curriculum guide from 1999 has provided reasonable flexibility (Einarsdóttir, 2006; Jónsdóttir, 2005c). Rather, they consider that the shortage of preschool teachers has been the biggest hindrance regarding their professionalization and professionalism (Jónsdóttir, 2005c). The high turnover rate of staff, prevailing until the recession period, was also an important factor. Further, in two wage contracts in recent decades, the Preschool Teachers' Union has agreed to increase the adult-child ratios within the preschools. Those acts have been highly debated amongst preschool teachers, although no research has been carried out connected to these changes. The preschool teachers have voted for the contracts because of the pay rise but the argument has focused on quality and individual care of each child (see Moriarty, 2000). It is possible that these changes in the adult-child ratios accompanied by lack of preschool teachers and high turnover rate of staff have challenged the professionalism, professional roles and identities of the preschool teachers in recent years. In Dýrfjörð's (2011) analysis of the influence of neo-liberalism on the Icelandic preschool system the influence has become rather obvious on e.g. the preschools' public structure and frameworks, establishing itself recently in deregulation regarding adult-child ratios and estimated space for each child within the preschools. Dýrfjörð (2011) argues that the preschool teachers' advocates have been sidetracked, "some because they agreed but others without thinking. They did not show resistance and draw a line of defence. Like the whole community they got charmed" (2011, p. 64).

In the next section 'democratic professionalism' will be discussed where the definition implies a comprehensive approach to professionalism, involving the work with children, the knowledge base of the preschool teacher, partnership with parents and leadership within early childhood institutions. This type of professionalism, among other research findings and approaches is adopted when analysing the findings.

2.2.1 Democratic professionalism

An alliance of eight leading institutions in the field of teacher education and education research, Institute of Education among them, founded at a meeting in Singapore in August 2007 (Gopinathan, Tan, Ping, Devi, Ramos and Chao, 2008) put forward the opinion that the professionalism of teachers needed re-conceptualisation, and thereby also initial teacher education. The teacher has to be prepared to work with other stakeholders because, as it says in the report: This is a 21st century take on the old adage "it takes a village to raise a child" (Gopinathan *et al.*, 2008, p. 38).

Whitty (2008) argues that collaboration of teachers and other relevant professionals does not reach far enough, as in the concept of *collaborative professionalism*, and collaboration with students, parents, other stakeholders and the community is necessary to develop successful education. This type of professionalism is termed as 'democratic', with a view to building a more democratic education system and ultimately a more open community (Whitty, 2008, p. 44). Dahlberg, Moss and Pence's (2007) conceptualisation of early childhood institutions as forums in civil societies accords with Whitty's (2008) view. In Dahlberg *et al's* (2007) view, forums are places always open for discussion and questioning, encouraging 'indocility' (p. 81) and confrontation, keeping questions of meaning open and valuing listening to thought. Whitty (2008) argues that this type of professionalism can be seen as re-professionalization, rather than de-professionalization, as has been connected to *managerial professionalism*.

Oberhuemer (2005, 2008), who has undertaken cross-national research for decades within the field of early childhood education on professionalism and professionalization, emphasises that the term 'democratic professionalism' has evolved as an alternative way of conceptualising the role of teachers in the face of increased control technologies. Further, Oberhuemer (2008) argues that the impacts of ever-changing economic, social and knowledge contexts on the globalised labour market, on the migration patterns of families, and consequently on

the every-day lives of children, present a continuous challenge for early childhood centres:

> It seems to me that both centres for young children and primary schools increasingly need to construe their role as multi-purpose facilities, integrating care, learning, education and health elements for children and as resource centres for families and the community – a model currently being pursued with the concept of children's centres in England (Oberhuemer, 2008, p. 138).

Oberhuemer (2005) defines four levels of activity related to the practice of 'democratic professionalism': *Interacting with children; the professional knowledge base; partnership with parents and centre management and leadership.* The inclusion of management and leadership makes this model of professionalism particularly appropriate to the thesis and therefore requires further examination.

Regarding the first level of activity, *interacting with children*, Oberhuemer (2005) argues that it is acknowledged that children are social agents with their own rights, participating in constructing and influencing their own life, based on socio-cultural theory (Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978), where development "is a process of people's changing participation in the socio-cultural activities of their communities" (Rogoff, 2003, p. 52). The focus is thus moved away from the child-centeredness which is evident in the here-and-now perspective. As Oberhuemer (2005) argues, this understanding foregrounds the skill for sustained shared thinking, between adult and child and between children, which is a nexus for effective learning, according to Siraj-Blatchford *et al* (2002), and "prerequisite for involving every girl and boy in the group in democratic dialogue and decision-making" (Oberhuemer, 2005, p. 13). Based on her critique of child-centred pedagogy and drawing upon scholars such as Dahlberg *et al.* (2007) and Moss (2007), Langford (2010) argues it is necessary to make gender and the intersection of gender, race and class the centre of pedagogy within the democratic space, or the forum. "Learning within this space is understood as a process where children, peers, teachers and families are actively, authentically and meaningfully engaged in relational co-construction of knowledge and skills" (Langford, 2010, p. 121). Additionally, Moss's' (2006, 2008) understanding of the pedagogue or preschool teacher as a *researcher* adds to co-constructive, reflective, critical, democratic and community based knowledge. The preschool teacher is seen as "a reflective practitioner who seeks to deepen her understanding of what is going on and how children learn, through documentation, dialogue, critical reflection and deconstruction" (Dahlberg *et al*, 2007, p. 82). As Moss (2006) explains:

> The worker as researcher is constantly seeking deeper understanding and new knowledge, in particular of the child and the child's learning processes. Research is part of everyday practice and can be conducted by everyone – not only the researching teacher, but the researching child and the researching parent … It

constructs new knowledge, it makes for critical thinking, it is part of citizenship and democracy … The researching worker is also a learner herself, co-constructing knowledge, as well as identities and values … An important tool for the researching, reflective and dialogic practitioner is pedagogical documentation that, most simply expressed, is a process for making pedagogical (or other) work visible and subject to interpretation, dialogue, confrontation (argumentation) and understanding … in this context, the researching worker is also a democratic practitioner (p. 36).

In the second level of activity of democratic professionalism, *the knowledge base,* Oberhuemer (2005) emphasises especially the ethical part of the preschool teachers' role and that knowledge is in fact contestable. As Lunt (2008) states 'ethical intelligence' is of importance. It is also seen as important to discuss sensitively the pedagogical and ethical viewpoints related to increasing cultural, social and economic diversity and to recognise and examine both personal and publicly endorsed assumptions, to acknowledge that there are 'multiple ways of knowing' (Oberhuemer, 2005, p. 14). According to Urban (2008) "[d]ata from recent and ongoing research suggest that practitioners are increasingly moving from a simplistic and technical to a relational and therefore uncertain perception of their practice. At the same time they seek, sometimes desperately, to avoid uncertainty, mistakes and 'failure', constructing themselves "in conversations with parents or in the public sphere, as 'experts' who know what to do and who are being told what to do by a knowledge-producing system that guides their practice" (2008, p. 143). This kind of knowledge is, according to Urban (2008) forming a habitus that contradicts the relational core of early childhood practice.

In research findings on preschool teachers' professionalism the features differ, and can be related to social contexts, but emphasis on commitment to collaborative and collective behaviour, such as collaboration with stakeholders is obvious, thus underlining the relational core of their work (Brock, 2006, 2009; Dalli, 2008; Kuisma and Sandberg, 2008).

In the next sections I will discuss Oberhuemer's (2005) third level of activity of democratic professionalism, *partnership with parents,* and the fourth level, *centre management and leadership,* in more detail than the first two, as they relate directly to the research questions and the focus of the research.

2.3 Partnership with parents

The OECD (2006) report concludes with the proposition that it is necessary to develop broad guidelines and curriculum standards with stakeholders to guide and support professional staff and facilitate communication between staff and parents. It also recommends the encouragement of family and community involvement in early

childhood services. This view is in harmony with Oberhuemer's (2005), Whitty's (2008) and Gopinathan *et al's* (2008) emphasis in relation to 'democratic professionalism'. Further, Oberhuemer (2005) emphasises that democratic professionalism is meant to find a way to communicate with *all* parents, and not least with the groups that are normally inactive in the formal discourse. She refers to Whalley (2006) and her colleagues at the Pen Green Centre in Corby, England, with regard to innovative approaches in relationship with parents. Whalley (2006) is quite determined when she is describing the philosophy of the centres and the role of the staff and parents:

> In Children's Centres staff are working towards equality of opportunity and social justice, they are committed to developing the social and cultural capital in areas where families are experiencing poverty, and they are committed to developing Children's Centres as learning communities (p. 2). … Children's Centres challenge traditional constructs of the child and the family. Staff in Children's Centres is committed to a strengths based approach: valuing parents as their child's best educators and passionate advocates not just in the rhetoric but in reality (p. 5).

Many research findings reveal that a meaningful partnership of staff and parents in preschools is important for the well-being and learning of the children (Epstein 1995; Knopf and Swick, 2007; Weiss, Caspe and Lopes, 2008). When explaining *partnership* of practitioners and parents, Rodd (2006) argues, that practitioners recognise that they have both shared and complementary goals with the parents. Both parties are experts but bring a different kind of expertise, they share accountability and their relationships are non-hierarchical and collaborative. They are supposed to act like a team in achieving the centre's mission and objectives.

In reality, it seems difficult to establish such partnership of parents and staff in preschools (Epstein, 1992; Lawson, 2003) and Lawson's (2003) findings revealed that teachers and parents had different ideas about parental involvement. While teachers were more 'school-based' in their thinking, the parents had a broader 'community view', not least parents of children with special needs (Swick and Hooks, 2005). In Brooker's (2010) research the findings revealed that although well-defined policies for the children's 'settling in' were in place in the relevant children centres, a relationship of openness between equals was not easily achieved.

Prior to the establishment of the parents' councils, participation of Icelandic parents as partners in the preschools seemed rare and mostly embedded in participation in events and meetings organised by the preschool. Collaboration has been mostly informal, taking place in conversations at the beginning and the end of the day and through yearly formal interviews between staff and parents (Garðarsdóttir and Einarsdóttir, 2007; Hreinsdóttir, 2009). Nevertheless, parents

seem to be content with their children's preschool, especially with regard to the children's well-being, and are satisfied with the informal daily interaction and communication with the staff as to how the children are welcomed in the morning (Björgvinsson, Svavarsdóttir and Gestsdóttir, 2009; Reykjavíkurborg, Leikskólasvið, 2009). Further, they do not seem to be enthusiastic about participating in decision making or the preschool's activities (Einarsdóttir, 2010). At the same time, preschool teachers have perceived that parents are content with the preschools and respect their educational work (Jónsdóttir, 2005c).

The parents have seemed to be insecure in their role and according to Sæmundsdóttir and Karvelsdóttir (2008) 93% of Icelandic preschool teachers viewed giving advice to parents as part of their job. The main areas the parents sought advice about, according to the preschool teachers, were practical matters about raising their children, developmental advice, and advice regarding discipline. In contrast, the preschool teachers seemed to be confident in their professional ability as specialists in education and care of young children (86%). Close to 80% felt that discipline problems had increased and that parents were less able to deal with them, and over 80% felt that parents had too little time for their children.

The time factor is also noticeable when it comes to the parents' role and participation within the preschool and is seen as a hindrance both by preschool teachers and parents along with a long working day (Einarsdóttir, 2010; Garðarsdóttir and Einarsdóttir, 2007; Hreinsdóttir, 2009). Einarsdóttir (2010) argues that Icelandic parents are under pressure and perceive conflict between their roles as parents and employees. Therefore, for partnership with parents, it is important that preschools develop collaboration methods that suit young parents participating in the labour market. Here the argument touches upon the *economic* function of preschools.

How early and how long?
Some research findings (e.g. Gullöv, 2006; Hreinsdóttir, 2009; Johansen, 2009) show that Nordic preschool teachers seem to be very worried because of the length of children's day in preschools caused by their parents' long working day, and that the children are really exhausted at the end of the day, and should spend more time with their parents. Gullöv's (2006) research among parents and pedagogues in Denmark revealed insecurity towards the parents' and the preschools' roles. The parents were afraid that if their child spent too many hours daily in the preschool it would affect the child's emotional well-being, and at the same time they feared that if the child went home too early, it might not develop social relations with other

children. The pedagogues were worried about the number of hours the children spent in the preschool and this could be seen as a symbolic expression of whether the parents were 'good' or 'bad'. In Hreinsdóttir's (2009) findings the preschool teachers were worried and the parents felt guilty because of the length of the children's day. Johansen's (2009) findings, in research where she asked Norwegian preschool teachers about the length of children's day in preschools, revealed that they were sceptical about full time day care of children. Most of the preschool teachers thought that children between one and three years old should not stay longer than six hours in the preschools, but older children might stay longer. Johansen (2009) interprets this view as a developmental psychology perspective focusing on the individual child. Norwegian preschool teachers' arguments related to the families were moralistic, and can be summed up within the sentence: "To be away is okay, but to be with the parents is best" (Johansen, 2009, p. 107). These arguments, according to Johansen (2009), can be understood in connection with attachment theories, but are also connected to ideas of the *good childhood* where the image of the home is characterised with tranquillity and peace, or a *heaven in a heartless world* (Gullestad, 2002; Midjo, 1994).

At the end of 2009, 70% of Norwegian children aged 12 to 24 months were enrolled in day care centres (preschools) and for 90 per cent of them a full day stay had been arranged. In a new survey (the MAFAL study) on attitudes of preschool teachers and assistants in Norwegian preschools (Løvgren and Gulbrandsen, 2012) the findings confirmed the former findings that the employees of preschools were apparently more sceptical of the present supply of day care than the parents are as users of their services. Only one third of the staff expressed the opinion that children should start at the age of one and have a full day stay at this age. According to Løvgren and Gulbrandsen (2012) the employees' opinion may be based on their personal feelings as parents and citizens but the huge increase in enrolment of very small children within day care centres also concerns them strongly as it changes their working conditions.

Preschool teachers are not the only ones who are unconvinced about long days for young children in preschools. According to Johansen (2009), a book with the title *Where are we heading with our children* by Simen Tvetereid (2008) created heavy discussions about children's stress in preschools, referring to Bowlby's attachment theories, which suggested that being in preschool was dangerous for the youngest children. In 2009 a psychotherapist in Iceland wrote the book *The years no one remembers* (Kjartansdóttir, 2009), with a similar message, and some preschool teachers have used it in their battle against long days for children in preschools,

aiming it towards authorities and parents. Other research has shown that out of home care of infants and toddlers has no developmental consequences if the preschool meets standards of high quality (Ahnert, Pinquart and Lamb, 2006; Lamb and Ahnert, 2006, 2011). According to Lamb and Ahnert (2011), high quality preschool should provide access to a variety of positive social relationships and adult–child ratios must be kept low. Further, the care providers need to be valued by society, well compensated, and enriched by serious and careful education and/or training.

We now turn to the fourth level of activity of the democratic professionalism, *centre management and leadership.*

2.4 Centre management and leadership

In Oberhuemer's (2005) definition of 'democratic professionalism' the fourth level of activity is *centre management and leadership*, which is relatively unusual when defining the concept *professionalism*. Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2005) argue that it is increasingly recognised that the quality of programmes and services for young children and their families is related to effective leadership. *The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education* (EPPE) project and *Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years* (REPEY) study showed that children made better all-round progress in settings where there was strong leadership, relatively little staff turnover and a good proportion of the staff were qualified. Also, the quality of the environment increased with the leader's childcare qualifications (Sylva, *et al.*, 2004). Some researchers in early childhood education have put forward ideas about suitable leadership in the field. Muijs *et al.* (2004) refer to Kagan and Hallmark's (2001) arguments of community leadership as appropriate to early years, and also to Mitchell (1989) who emphasises that early childhood leadership needs to focus on the entire family, which is in accordance with the ideology of democratic professionalism. A relationship can be seen between community leadership and Dahlberg's *et al*'s (2007) ideas of the early childhood centre as a forum, Langford's (2010) arguments of democratic centre, and professional learning communities are assumed by some researchers to be a successful way of improving teaching and learning of children (Harris and Muijs, 2004; Stoll and Louis, 2007; Sergiovanni, 2005). According to Stoll and Louis (2007) the term 'professional learning community' suggests that the focus is not just on individual teachers' learning but on professional learning within the context of a cohesive group that focuses on collective knowledge and occurs within an ethic of interpersonal caring that permeates the life of teachers, students and school leaders (2007, p. 3). When this definition is compared to Dahlberg *et al*'s

(2007) conceptualisation of early childhood institutions as forums in civil societies, the role of the parents and the connection to the neighbourhood and community is missing. Others talk about communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) or leadership learning communities (Whalley *et al.* 2008), with similar purpose. Within such communities the emphasis is on 'teachers as leaders' (Barth, 2001; Harris, 2005; Harris and Muijs, 2004; Lambert, 2006; York-Barr and Duke, 2004), and on leadership ideas emphasising that "[s]chool leadership has a greater influence on schools and pupils when it is widely distributed" (Leithwood *et al.*, 2008, p. 34). In her presentation of democratic professionalism, Oberhuemer (2005) recommends distributed leadership, which will be the topic of the next section.

2.4.1 Distributed leadership

The concept of *distributed leadership* is quite often mentioned by researchers in relation to early childhood leadership and the development of a professional learning community. According to Harris (2008), a distributed leadership perspective recognises that there are multiple leaders and leadership activities widely shared within and between organisations. It also acknowledges the work of all individuals who contribute to leadership practice whether they are designated as formal leaders or not. Spillane (2006) emphasises that from a distributed perspective, leadership practice that results from *interactions* among leaders, other practitioners, and their situation, is critical. Research findings reveal that distributed leadership can assist capacity building in schools which contributes to school improvement (Harris, 2004), and there is clear evidence of its positive effects on teachers' self-efficacy and levels of morale. However, further research is needed to confirm a relationship between distributed forms of leadership and improved student learning outcomes (Harris, 2004). The distributed leadership model presumes that there could be more than one leader within a single organisational setting. For example there could be four people working side by side with each specialising in terms of curriculum, personnel management, centre administration and community development work (Waniganayake, 2000). "Understood in this sense, distributive leadership reflects a participatory culture of peer learning and of managing and evaluating organisational change" (Oberhuemer, 2005, p. 13).

Pound (2008) argues that everyone who works in early childhood education must demonstrate many of the capabilities and characteristics of a leader. There she is not only talking about the leaders with formal role descriptions, like head teachers, assistant head teachers and group leaders, but also about *leaderful* teams and practices (Raelin, 2011; Whalley, 2006; Whalley *et al.*, 2008). Whalley (2006)

describes the emphasis in the Pen Green Centre with the concepts *shared leadership and management* and most often a leaderful team of senior staff are working alongside newly trained and newly qualified staff rather than with one charismatic leader. With similar purpose, Lambert (2003, 2006) talks about *leadership capacity*, meaning broad-based, skilful participation in the work of leadership and a way of understanding sustainable school improvement. In Lambert's (2006) research within fifteen schools the findings revealed that as leadership capacity grew, "teachers experienced a personal and collective journey from dependency to high levels of self-organization, and demonstrated a readiness to lead a school without a principal" (2006, p. 251).

Harris (2005) argues that the concept of *teacher leadership* closely aligns with contemporary discussions about distributed leadership as it is neither position nor authority based, but widely shared or distributed throughout the organisation.

2.4.2 Teacher leadership

Harris (2005) argues that various evidences show that teacher leadership can contribute to effectiveness, improvement and development on school, teacher and student level.

As is the case with many concepts, there is a lack of consensus about the definition of a 'teacher leader'. Katzenmeyer and Möller (2001) argue that "teachers who are leaders lead within and beyond the classroom, identify with and contribute to a community of teacher learners and leaders, and influence others towards improved educational practice" (2001, p. 17). In Danielson's (2007) research she defined *formal* teacher leaders as those in roles of group chairs, master teachers and instructional coaches, who typically apply for their positions and go through a formal selection process. In contrast, *informal* teacher leaders emerge spontaneously and organically from the teachers' group and voluntarily take on initiatives to address a problem or implement a new program. Although they have no official positional authority, they gain their respect and influence from their expertise and experience.

Muijs and Harris (2003) suggest that there are four dimensions of the teacher leadership role which distinguish it from other forms of leadership. In defining those dimensions they quote findings of many researchers. The first dimension is a *brokering role* and concerns the way in which teachers work with and across school boundaries and structures to establish social linkages within the community where opportunities for meaningful development among teachers are maximized. A second dimension focuses upon *participative leadership*, where teachers work

collegially with other teachers to encourage the examination of instructional practices. A third dimension of teacher leadership is the *mediating role* as teacher leaders are important sources of instructional expertise and information as they demonstrate high levels of it themselves. The final, and possibly the most important dimension of the teacher leadership role, is *forging close relationships* with individual teachers through which mutual learning takes place. Many barriers can exist within schools against implementing distributed or teacher leadership, as for example a prevailing top-down management structure, based on the 19th century industrial model, which can be hard to change (Harris, 2005; Lindahl, 2008). Preschools are smaller and probably not as bureaucratic as some other school types but the general effects of the traditional top-down management structure can however be seen (Jónsdóttir, 2008, 2009).

2.4.3 Leadership of preschool teachers in Iceland

As is confirmed in the Preschool Act (90/2008) in Iceland the preschool teachers are supposed to be leading professionals within preschools, but as research findings have shown (Ebbeck and Waniganayake, 2003; Hard, 2008; Jónsdóttir, 2001; Rodd, 2006), preschool teachers see themselves mainly as teachers or carers of children but not as leaders working with adults. In each preschool there are usually three or more groups (classes) and the children are divided between them, normally by age. From 1987, there has been a formal leader within each group, a *group leader*, who also has a managerial role. Since then the tendency has been to strengthen the hierarchical pyramid within the preschools, by e.g. making more formal demands of the group leaders' positional leadership role and authority, as a leader and manager of staff within their group, which can consist of three to five practitioners and/or professionals. There, the Preschool Teachers' Union and the municipalities have been active, adding directing clauses into the wage contracts and updated job descriptions.

The impact of leadership style and culture

Many research findings reveal that early childhood practitioners generally favour the so-called stereotypically feminine leadership style, or team-based leadership, preferring caring, personal and emotional leaders rather than the more traditional hierarchical style (Ebbeck and Waniganayake, 2003; Hard, 2008; Jónsdóttir, 2008, 2009).

In my IFS study (Jónsdóttir, 2008, 2009) the findings revealed a constant conflict between a 'bottom up' and 'top down' culture, and a sort of 'culture clash', which led

to various problems. On the one hand there was the 'old' caring, emotional and friendly culture accompanied by the interpersonal, collegial stereotypically feminine leadership model. On the other hand there existed simultaneously a hierarchical authority structure, accompanied by an 'emerging' managerial, authoritative, and sometimes authoritarian, stereotypically masculine leadership model. The hierarchical authority structure began to evolve more quickly with the establishment of the group leader's position and the introduction of more professional and managerial demands. Both these leadership styles seemed somehow to be barriers to professionals to perform in accordance with their specialist expertise. The simultaneous use of the stereotypically feminine and masculine leadership styles appeared to exacerbate conflicts and problems within the preschool, leading to the silencing of critical debate, and feeling of powerlessness of those lower in the hierarchy (Jónsdóttir, 2008, 2009). Further, the group leaders' authority position was quite vulnerable. By using their authority in a more commanding way they met resistance, and were labelled as 'arrogant' among the assistant teachers, but by using the authority in the 'nice' way the staff could 'forget' to implement decisions. Somehow the group leaders were like the 'piggies in the middle' between the head teachers and the assistant head teachers' formal 'power over' on one hand and the assistant teachers' micropolitical power 'from below'. The group leaders were thus at the centre of the 'culture clash'.

Similarly, in my focus group research (Jónsdóttir, 2005c), with preschool teachers within the Preschool Teachers' Union, the participants agreed that it could be difficult to be the only preschool teacher in the group, and thus a group leader: "Everyone is seen as equals" in the preschool and therefore the professional sometimes hesitated to exercise her or his power and take the lead (see Moyles, 2001). The preschool teachers felt the closeness in the group as rather strong and thus that a radical change was dangerous. The group leaders therefore sometimes chose to be co-dependent, pretended not to notice, hesitated to give the staff direct orders, or performed the tasks by themselves, to avoid conflicts. They accepted the authority role but perceived it as hard to practise (Jónsdóttir, 2005c).

Because of a lack of attention given to the early childhood context (York-Barr and Duke, 2004) research findings on distributed or teacher leadership cannot be directly connected to situations within early childhood settings. Dana and Yendol-Hoppey (2005) argue that attention must be given not only to the leadership of directors and administrators, but also to those who work most closely with children, that is the early childhood teacher. For, to date, many early childhood teachers "are ill-prepared to be change agents and advocates for their programs ... [n]or are these

roles generally expected of them" (Dana and Yendol-Hoppey, 2005, p. 204, quoting Rust, 1993). Nevertheless, Siraj-Blatchford and Manni (2005) have some doubts about distributed leadership in early childhood settings where staff are often young, under qualified and lacking experience. The authors highlight that certain conditions have to be in place before such capacity building can authentically occur, including the internal capacity to manage change and sustain improvement and the existence of collegial relations between all potential participants. They also discuss and argue (perhaps paradoxically, as they say) that strong leadership may be necessary in the development of high levels of collaboration and team work that are required (Siraj-Blatchford and Manni, 2005, p. 29).

The main emphasis of democratic professionalism, as put forward by Whitty and Oberhuemer, is, as I understand it, a comprehensive approach, based on the educational ideology of the socio-cultural theory, underlining the co-construction of knowledge of relevant stakeholders. Thus, it is necessary to address the leadership approach as the knowledge building and learning takes place, not only between the preschool teachers and children, but in the whole institution and in connection to parents and the community.

I will now turn to examination of the construction of professional identities, where the construction itself is dependent upon each individual and on her or his values, beliefs, attitudes, feelings and understanding, and on personal history, ethnicity, gender and culture (Forde *et al.*, 2006), although simultaneously affected by discourses and contextual factors.

2.5 Professional identity of preschool teachers

The concept of *identity* has different meanings in literature and research. What these various meanings seem to have in common is the idea that identity is not a fixed attribute of a person, but a relational phenomenon, and an on-going process of interpreting oneself as a certain kind of person and being recognized as such in a given context. Thus, identity can be seen as an answer to the frequent question: "who am I at this moment?" (Beijaard *et al.*, 2004, p. 108). When focusing on the *professional identity* of a teacher, Beijaard *et al.* (2004) argue that in the on-going, dynamic process, an individual negotiates external and internal expectations as he works to make sense of her or himself and his work as a teacher. As mentioned in the introduction, teachers' identities are not necessarily synonymous with their roles and "identities organise the meaning whereas roles organise the functions" (Sachs, 2003, p. 126).

Further, according to Beauchamp and Thomas (2009), the complex link between the personal and professional selves of a teacher must be taken into account in understanding teacher identity. Some of the factors involved are: the interplay of *emotions* as a part of the self and identity (Zembylas, 2003), the *narrative* and *discourse aspects* of the self and the shaping of identity (Connelly and Clandinin, 1999; Moss, 2006), the *role of reflection* in understanding the self and identity (Cable and Miller, 2008; Craft and Paige Smith, 2008), the *connection between identity and agency* (Woodrow, 2008), and *the influence of contextual factors* (Woods and Jeffrey, 2002). In the following section I will discuss some of these factors and add a section on *professionals in a field numerically dominated by laypersons* related to professional identity. However, I will begin with discussion about *gender* and identity, as gender evidently affects the identity construction of the preschool teacher who is generally female, low paid and whose social status has been relatively low through the decades.

Gender and identity

Female professions have generally been seen as subordinated to male occupations. Amatai Etzioni (1969), established the concept of 'traditional professionalism' (Whitty, 2008), where he distinguishes between professions with fully-fledged professional status, like doctors and lawyers, and semi-professions, like teachers, nurses and social workers, who claim this status but are "neither fully established nor fully desired" (p. v). According to Etzioni (1969) the training of professionals has to be five years or more and their knowledge created or applied rather than communicated, and they are often concerned with matters of life and death. The semi-professions, on the other hand, have shorter training and therefore their amount of knowledge is less. Their knowledge is communicated rather than created and their amount of authority, responsibility and autonomy is smaller. Further, according to Etzioni, a "part of the problem is due to the fact that a typical professional is a male where the typical semi-professional is a female" (p. Xv). According to Witz (1992), the exclusionary and demarcatory strategies of the old professionalism were embedded within patriarchal power relations and used to exclude women from the traditional professions. Witz (1992) explains the gender dimension by saying that "because women are not men, 'semi-professions' are not professions" (Witz, 1992, p. 60).

Acker (1999) argues that teaching, nursing and social work have struggled to gain the professional status of established professions, for example, by raising the qualifications necessary to enter the field. In Iceland, the new Act on the education

of all teachers (no. 87/2008) contains a clause about application for authorisation to use the professional title *Preschool teacher* which is a new stipulation. With this clause on authorisation, all traditional requirements of 'a fully-fledged profession' have at last been met (see e.g. Etzioni, 1969). However, there still seems to be stereotypical gendered prejudices connected to the preschool teachers' work, as people seem to identify it with the domestic rather than the public sphere, thus calling on the 'caring script', that is "a set of expectations that mimics women's traditional work in the home" (Acker, 1999, p. 277) which may have helped resistance to recognising the profession's knowledge and competences (Acker, 1999; Lasky, 2000; Steinnes, 2007). Coleman's (2002) findings among female and male secondary head teachers revealed that gendered stereotypes are now less overtly applied than earlier, but as Coleman (2002) is arguing: "[T]he evidence of the continuing application of the stereotypes against women can only be traced to the deep rooted, patriarchal prejudice of society" (2002, p. 95).

Additionally, Langford (2010) connects the status of early childhood teachers to the focus of child-centred pedagogy:

> When I was a kindergarten teacher, a manual advised me that my classroom should be so centred on the children that a visitor would not be able to identify who I was. Rendering me invisible struck me as poignantly counter to attempts to raise the respect and status of early childhood educators and to include the teacher as an important member of the classroom community. Later, I encouraged my students in a teacher preparation programme to embrace child-centred pedagogy. Yet as we discussed the role of the teacher in child-centredness as a 'facilitator', and 'stage manager', I felt uneasy about placing a group of predominantly young women struggling with the low status accorded their professional choice 'behind the scenes' of an early childhood education setting (Langford, 2010, p. 113).

Langford (2010) quotes Steedman (1985) who locates the child-centred pedagogy in Froebels' description of the teacher who is 'the mother made conscious' and the 'reification of feminine within the pedagogy'. According to Steedman (1987, in Langford, 2010), the social context for the dissemination of the mother-made-conscious teacher was the 'feminisation of the trade' of teaching. Steedman (1987, in Langford, 2010) argues that prescribed psychological dimensions of modern good mothering were forged by nurses, nannies and primary school teachers who represent the ideal mother who spends the entire day in one room with children, watching and nurturing them. Einarsdóttir's (2006, 2008) definition of the first and most traditional camp of Icelandic preschool teachers seems similar to that description, and so does the understanding in the society of the preschool worker as 'substitute mother' (Moss, 2006).

Osgood (2006) argues that an ethic of care (Noddings, 1995) and emotional labour are cornerstones to early childhood practitioners' understanding of

themselves, and that these qualities are denigrated in dominant discourses of professionalism. Further, according to Moyles (2001), feelings and emotions such as *passion* (my emphasis) are acceptable, and indeed desirable, as part of educational thinking and practice. Moyles (2001, quoting Stone, 1994 and Yelland, 1998) explains that the culture of passion, however, can also carry associations of being anti-intellectual, idealistic, subjective, indecisive and 'feminine':

> Herein lies one of many paradoxes in early childhood: it seems impossible to work effectively with very young children without the deep and sound commitment signified by the use of words like 'passionate'. Yet this very symbolisation gives a particular emotional slant to the work of early childhood practitioners which can work for or against them in their everyday roles and practices, bringing into question what constitutes professionalism and what being 'a teacher' means in such diversified contexts (Moyles, 2001, p. 81).

Similarly, Gillivrai (2008) points out that tension arises from the dichotomy between a workforce that is construed as caring, maternal and gendered, as opposed to professional, degree educated and highly trained. Related to the paradox, described by Moyles and Gillivrai, Taggart (2011) argues that it is the difference in interpretation of vocation that is the crucial issue and that the English ECEC (Early Childhood Education and Care) seems to be suffering from the historical perception that the vocation of most practitioners is *biological* on account of gender. 'Passion', for example, in the context of school teaching, nursing or ministry does not appear to undermine professional status. And Taggart (2011) concludes that "[i]n order to transcend this inheritance and seek parity with other 'caring professions', the passion espoused by those who are 'good with children' needs to be aligned with a similar social vision of hope, health and well-being" (2011, p. 93). Reconceptualising practice is therefore needed to champion 'caring' as a sustainable element of professional work.

The preschools field is numerically dominated by laypersons, or the assistant teachers, mainly women, and this situation affects the professional identities of preschool teachers and adds to the gendered discourses related to the field.

Professionals in a field numerically dominated by laypersons

An element which can diminish the preschool teachers' sense of professionalism and affect their construction of professional identity is that preschool teachers are a group of professionals working in a field dominated by laypersons (Steinnes, 2007), specifically a low-paid female workforce, which adds to the gender dimension of the role. Interestingly, the findings of my focus group research (Jónsdóttir, 2005c) revealed that the preschool teachers felt that parents recognised their work but at the same time they did not feel enough respect towards their expertise from the

assistant teachers working by their side. The preschool teachers thought it was necessary for them to become stronger professionals 'at home', by supporting each other and standing side by side (Jónsdóttir, 2005c). By stressing their knowledge and expertise they would strengthen their professional identity. Thus they seem to be struggling for status and respect within the preschool as well as within the society.

In my IFS (Jónsdóttir, 2008, 2009) the findings revealed that there had been power struggles between preschool teachers and untrained staff as long as 'the oldest ones' could remember and some untrained staff members were meant to be working in the same manner as preschool teachers. In fact, Olsen's (2011) findings within Danish preschools did not exhibit any evident hierarchical division of labour among assistants and the professionals within the preschools' groups and assistants could not on this basis be regarded as 'assistants'. Nevertheless, Danish preschool teachers seem eager to strengthen their professionalism and distinguish themselves from the other staff. On the other hand, their sense of collegiality makes it complicated to show their expertise and be acknowledged because of their expertise, and somehow they seem to lack the courage. For example they perceived it intolerable to let the untrained staff do the domestic work, like sweeping the floors, because they are not 'second class people' (Nørregård-Nielsen, 2005, p. 160). Kuisma and Sandberg's (2008) findings, in research with Swedish preschool teachers and students, revealed that both groups often benefit from an inclusion theory, as preschool teachers and day care assistants carry out the same activities, and the researchers argue that preschools are built on democracy, and therefore everybody is considered to have equal *value* (my emphasis) in the working team, although having qualitatively different education. The fundamental question thus remains: "How can qualitative differences between staff become visible and valued in preschool (2008, p. 194)"? As Moyles (2001, quoting Moyles and Suschitzky, 1995) argues, a clearer definition of equality and further discussions about roles are certainly needed, with the purpose of "raising the standards within the settings through acknowledgement of different roles, experience and expertise" (Moyles, 2001, p. 81).

In Steinnes (2007) findings, the Norwegian preschool teachers claimed that they had developed special knowledge during their education but because of limited pedagogical discussions within the preschools their knowledge was soon situated in the shadow or 'behind the scenes' (see Langford, 2010 and Nørregård-Nielsen, 2005). Simultaneously, Steinnes (2007) findings revealed that preschool teachers had difficulties with verbalising their knowledge, and if the preschool teachers

themselves are not aware of, or do not value, their own competences they can have difficulties with telling others about them. Similarly, in Kuisma and Sandberg's (2008) study none of the participants focused on professional language and its importance for professionalism. Steinnes (2007) argues that if preschool teachers do not perceive the strength in their own competences it maybe a revelation of how they value themselves. It can thus affect the professional identity of the preschool teachers, and their professional activity.

Some governments seem to have found a solution to the dilemma. Fenech *et al* (2010) report that the Australian government uses the term *educators* to describe all *professionals*, or staff, working in ECE centres. They regard such 'regimes of truth' as problematic for several reasons, e.g. because "it fails to recognise early childhood university-qualified teachers as experts and accordingly limits their capacity to work autonomously and exercise professional judgment in the interests of children and families" (p. 91). Further, according to Fenech *et al.* (2010, quoting Lakoff and Grady, 1998) teachers could be seen as expensive, driving up the cost of care or the 'child-storage'. Similarly, Moss (2010) asks if we should focus rather on education and the educator, the purpose of the former and the requirements of the latter, instead of focusing on the concept 'professionalism' and who is a professional and who is not: "If we talk about 'professionalism', might that not be a distraction that risks diverting us from the real task in hand – an education and educators able to respond to the huge challenges facing us? …Perhaps it is time to move beyond 'professionalism'?" (2010, p. 18).

Discourses and narratives of all relevant stakeholders and the prevailing discourse within the society are for that reason of great importance when identities are constructed, and they help to explain the stakeholders' views of the professional role and leadership of preschool teachers.

Discourses and narratives

According to Connelly and Clandinin (1993), teachers' identities are constructed within competing *discourses* and partly constituted and negotiated in public *narratives* about them (see also Urban and Dalli, 2008; Sachs, 2001; Zembylas, 2003).

In her research, Sachs (2001) identified two competing professional identities of teachers related to educational reforms. On the one hand it was the *entrepreneurial* identity emerging out of the managerial discourses, related to 'managerial professionalism' (Whitty, 2008), highlighting accountability and effectiveness, where identity is defined in terms of compliance with these aspects. On the other hand,

Sachs (2001) identified the *activist* identity, developing in response to the democratic discourses, as in Whitty's (2008) and Oberhuemer's (2005) definition of democratic professionalism, where the emphasis is on "collaborative, cooperative action between teachers and other educational stakeholders" (Sachs, 2001, p. 153).

As Moss (2006) argues, understandings of the workforce in preschools seem to be produced from different discourses, and different understandings related to concepts of professionalism (Moss, 2006). Moss (2006) talks about the understanding of the early childhood worker in society as *substitute mother*, where 'care work' and 'attachment pedagogy' (Singer, 1993) are emphasised and non-maternal care needs to be modelled on a dyadic mother-child relationship. Politicians, according to Moss (2006) would never admit to having such view. This is a gendered image of the practitioner which implies that little or no education is needed to undertake the work. This understanding can partly be related to Einarsdóttir's (2006, 2008) first camp of how preschool teachers see the role of preschool as care giving. Similarly, Moss (2006) argues that the understanding of the worker as *technician* is widespread in the English-language world, where transmission of knowledge is valued, curricula are prescriptive, 'outcome pedagogy' is prioritised, and performance is assessed. The understanding of the early childhood worker as technician, described by Moss (2006) is grounded in similar ideology to that of Sachs' (2001) entrepreneurial identity and can be related to Einarsdóttir's second camp where the preschool teachers see their role as teaching knowledge. Moss's' (2006) third understanding or the worker as a *researcher* is more related to Sachs' (2003) activist identity, and has been connected to stakeholders' co-construction of knowledge and democratic professionalism. However, Einarsdóttir's third camp of integration of teaching and care giving seems a little different, as I see it, as lacking the activist element and the emphasis on the collaboration of stakeholders in open forums, as in democratic professionalism.

Agency and identity

As suggested by Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) there is a connection between identity and *agency*. Agency refers to our individual capacity to influence events, whether personal or professional. It is based on feelings of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997), that is, the extent to which we believe that we have the capacity to achieve what we think of as desirable outcomes.

As Langford (2010) underlines, it is necessary to reconstruct teachers and children simultaneously but not separately, and position them at the centre of a pedagogy that is a democratic space for everyone. As Langford (2010) argues:

"This reconstruction is, in my view, one of the necessary conditions for addressing the low status and invisibility of early childhood professionals in liberal democratic states and to work toward social change for the profession" (2010, p. 124). By exercising authority the female teacher's visibility, social position, status and significance is declared at the centre. As Maher (2001) argues, we must move beyond a fear of the female teacher's authority and of empowering them as agents in their work with children "because this empowerment is always expressed in opposition to children's empowerment" (2001, p. 26). The female teachers' authority must be reframed not as control over children but as an aspect of her right as a citizen in the democratic centre of early years' pedagogy. Preschool teachers thus need to behave as agents of change (Woodrow, 2008).

These elements Langford (2010), Maher (2001) and Woodrow (2008) are explaining can also be seen as the leadership aspect of the professional role. Woodrow (2008) argues that research findings from Australia (e.g. Ebbeck and Waniganayake, 2003; Hard, 2004) reveal a strong lack of identification with the concept of 'leadership' amongst early childhood individuals and she advocates for a more *robust* identity of preschool teachers, characterised by leadership. Goffin and Washington (2007), based on their findings, look further to the whole field of early childhood education and suggest that there is a need to move beyond reliance on individual leaders and toward a creation of a field-wide community of diverse leaders with the purpose of affecting political decision-making and making use of influence when relevant.

Although, preschool teachers are the main actors in constructing their identities they are always under the influence of social, contextual factors which constrain their agency.

Influence of contextual factors

Woods and Jeffrey's study (2002) examines the way in which primary teachers have had to reconstruct their identities as the educational system itself has altered, stressing greater accountability, increased assessment, distrust and surveillance (Whitty, 2008). In trying to make sense of their professional role, teachers may construct *multiple identities* (my emphasis) to meet competing demands and expectations, and this can lead to a sense of unsteadiness and uncertainty (Woods and Jeffrey, 2002, p. 105). Forde *et al.* (2006) argue that the complexities inherent in defining identity are obvious in many professions, particularly those which have recently sought professional status (such as nurses and teachers). They have to form their professional identities within stressful working environments, and have to

deal with management and policy emphases on standards, performance and outcomes. Stronach, Corbin, McNamara, Stark and Warne (2002) speak of teacher and nurse identities as being 'in flux' (p. 109). Therefore, professional identities are negotiated within situations where identity is affected by dilemmas and difficulties that are often outside the control of the individual. In this relationship it is appropriate to refer back to the unsettling effects of the contextual factors outlined in the Introduction, chapter 1, including the 'greediness urge', the recession in Iceland, the cutting of finances in the running of preschools and other decisions of government and municipalities. There I am referring to the placement of early childhood education within systems, curriculum and frameworks, education of the professionals, situation of parents and children in Iceland and the preschool workforce. Additionally, prevailing discourses of stakeholders, as mentioned above shape and construct identities.

Summary

Gender is seen as an important part of individual identity and of the professional identity of preschool teachers as a female profession. Additionally, it can be argued, that the educational pedagogy embedded in the role, such as emphasis on child-centredness (Langford, 2010; Kristjánsson, 2006, talks about Nordic child-centeredness) seems to have been affecting the visibility and identity of the preschool teachers, as does their placement in a field of laypersons. Further, tension can arise from the dichotomy between a workforce that is construed as caring, maternal and gendered, as opposed to professional, degree educated and highly trained. Under these circumstances a profession can construct multiple identities or identities can be 'in flux'. Agency and authority of preschool teachers is seen as important but discourses and contextual factors inevitably affect how identities are constructed.

2.6 Summary of the literature review and an emerging framework

As a summary of the literature review I establish an emerging analytical framework (see section 2.6.1) which will be used in analysing the data from the focus groups and the interviews with politicians. As stated in the Introduction the views and perceptions of preschool teachers are the focus of the research, and views of other stakeholders mirror their views and perceptions. The elements under study, identified in the research questions, are the preschool teachers' professional roles, leadership, identities and affecting contextual factors and discourses, and the framework includes those elements, as subsections in the summary. The functions

of preschools appear as a kind of umbrella, as those functions are in the interaction with the elements under study. In the analytical framework I have tried to differentiate between professional roles, leadership and identities, although all those elements are closely connected and interwoven and some of the points could be in more than one column. There the leadership function is the most difficult to extract, and in the column on the professional role I focus on the leadership role in general, but not positional leadership, which is included in the leadership column. The elements related to 'democratic professionalism' have emerged through the literature review as particularly important and are thus presented in a separate framework. They are generally seen as exemplary and possibly aspirational in the context of analysing the data and presenting the findings. A commentary on the framework follows its presentation in table 2.1 and table 2.2 below.

2.6.1 Analytical frameworks

Table 2.1. Emerging analytical framework.

Functions of preschools: Educational, economic and social justice (Vandenbroeck, Coussée and Bradt, 2010)			
Professional role of Icelandic preschool teachers (PTs)	**Leadership of Icelandic pre-school teachers**	**Affecting contextual factors and discourses in Iceland**	**Professional identity of Icelandic preschool teachers**
'Contested ideologies' (Jensen et al., 2010; Jensen, 2009; Bennett, 2003, 2005; Broström, 2006; Lenz Taguchi, 2006, 2008; Einarsdóttir, 2003, 2006, 2008; Hreinsdóttir, 2009; Karlsdóttir and Einarsdóttir, 2004; Kristjánsson, 2006; Langford, 2010; Moss et al., 2000; Wagner and Einarsdóttir, 2006; Wagner et al., 2008; Thoresen, 2009; Uprichard, 2008)	Horizontal/inter-personal/ feminine (Dana and Yendol-Hoppey, 2005; Ebbeck and Waniganayake, 2003; Hard, 2004, 2006, 2008; Jónsdóttir, 2001, 2008, 2009; Muijs et al., 2004; Rodd, 2006)	Integration of day-care centres and playschools

Shortage of preschool teachers (34%)

The educational relations to other school levels strengthened

M.Ed. degree as for other teachers

Parents' council | PTs are feeling autonomous in organising educational work (Einarsdóttir, 2006; Jónsdóttir, 2005c)

PTs perceive that parents are pleased with the preschools and respect their professionalism (Jónsdóttir, 2005c) and parents seem content (Björgvinsson et al., 2009; Einarsdóttir, 2008, 2010) |
| PTs insecure about the caring or the teaching aspect of the role (Einarsdóttir, 2003)

Three camps of Icelandic preschools and PTs roles (Einarsdóttir, 2006, 2008)

PTs do not practice partnership with parents (Brooker, 2010; Garðarsdóttir and Einarsdóttir, 2007; Hreinsdóttir, 2009) and parents do not seem eager to participate (Einarsdóttir, 2010)

PTs worried about size of groups in preschool and long days (Gullestad, 2002; Gullöv, 2006; Hreinsdóttir, 2009; Johansen, 2009; Løvgren and Gulbrandsen, 2012) | Hierarchical/ masculine (Jónsdóttir, 2001, 2008, 2009; Siraj-Blatchford and Manni, 2005)

Feminine/ hierarchical "Culture clash";

Group leaders as 'piggies in the middle';

Power struggles of preschool teachers, especially group leaders, and assistant teachers (Jónsdóttir, 2008, 2009)

Professional learning community (Harris and Muijs, 2004; Stoll and Louis, 2007; Sergiovanni, 2005) | Neo-liberal effects: Number of children constantly higher within groups; deregulation (Dýrfjörð, 2011)

More mothers working full-time (Statistics Iceland, 2010a)

Children begin younger and are staying longer in preschools (Statistics Iceland, 2010b)

-Stressful families (Stefánsson, 2008)

Cultural mismatch (Júlíusdóttir, 2006)

Lack of family policy (Eydal, 2006)

The 'greediness urge' (Impetus, 2009), collapse of the economic system;

The impact of the recession:
-Financial difficulties in families
-Cut downs in preschools

'Competing discourses': Gendered discourses (e.g.substitute mother) (Acker, 1999; Coleman, 2002; Langford, 2010; Lasky, 2000; Moss, 2006; Steinnes, 2007; Witz, 1992) or school-directed (e.g. technician) (Moss, 2006) | 'Invisibility' related to child-centredness (Langford, 2010)

Identity oriented in a field dominated by laypersons (Jónsdóttir, 2005c, 2008, 2009; Kuisma and Sandberg, 2008; Moyles, 2001; Nørregård-Nielsen, 2006; Olsen, 2011; Steinnes, 2007)

PTs showing lack of identification with the concept of 'leadership' (Ebbeck and Waniganayake, 2003; Hard, 2004, 2006, 2008; Jónsdóttir, 2001; Rodd, 2006; Woodrow, 2008)

PTs are not aware of and have difficulties with verbalising their knowledge (Steinnes, 2007)

PTs struggling for acknowledgement both inside (Jónsdóttir, 2005c: Nørregård-Nielsen, 2006) and outside preschools (Nørregård-Nielsen, 2006)

Gendered profession, as caring, maternal and 'feminine' versus professional, degree educated and highly trained (Gillivrai, 2008; Moyles, 2001; Osgood, 2006; Taggart, 2011)

Insecure, in flux or multiple identities (Forde et al., 2006; Woods and Jeffrey, 2002; Stronach et al., 2002) |

Table 2.2. Democratic professionalism

Professional role of Icelandic preschool teachers	Leadership of Icelandic preschool teachers	Affecting contextual factors and discourses in Iceland	Professional identity of Icelandic preschool teachers
4 levels of activity (Oberhuemer, 2005; Whitty, 2008): Socio-cultural approach where children are social agents participating in constructing their own life (Dahlberg *et al.*, 2007; Moss, 2007; Langford, 2010, Oberhuemer, 2005) Preschool teacher as researching, reflective, democratic and leading professional, using documentation, dialogue, critical reflection and deconstruction (Dahlberg *et al.*, 2007; Moss, 2006, 2008) Ethical stance towards social justice, ethical intelligence (Lunt, 2008; Oberhuemer, 2005); Relational practice (Urban, 2008) Parents as active partners in the centre; relationships of openness, seen as researchers (Brooker, 2010; Moss, 2006; Whalley, 2006)	Preschool open to stakeholders and community (forum), transparency, democracy (Dahlberg *et al.*, 2007; Moss, 2006, 2008) -Distributed/teacher leadership (Barth, 2001; Dana and Yendol-Hoppey, 2005; Danielson, 2007; Ebbeck and Waniganayake, 2003; Harris, 2004, 2005, 2008; Harris and Muijs, 2004; Leithwood *et al*, 2008; Muijs and Harris, 2003; Spillane, 2006; York-Barr and Duke, 2004; Waniganayake, 2000) Leadership capacity, leaderful teams (Lambert, 2003, 2006; Raelin, 2011; Whalley, 2006; Whalley *et al.*, 2008) Field-wide leadership (Goffin and Washington, 2007) Comprehensive view and integration of all functions of preschools (Oberhuemer, 2005; Vandenbroeck *et al.*, 2010; Whitty, 2008) It takes a village to raise a child (Gopinathan *et al.*, 2008)	Discourses of stakeholders related to democratic professionalism (e.g. Moss, 2006, as researcher; Sachs, 2001, 2003, as activist identity)	Shaped primarily by teachers themselves (Sachs, 2001, 2003; Woodrow, 2008) Deconstruction of children and preschool teachers to work against the invisibility of the professionals (Langford, 2010) PTs having authority, agency, visibility, social position, status and significance, central within new pedagogy (Langford, 2010) Robust leadership identity; agents of change (Woodrow, 2008)

Professional role of preschool teachers

As in other Nordic countries the ideology of the professional role, or more precisely, the educational role, of preschool teachers has been characterised by contested emphases. It can clearly be seen in Einarsdóttir's (2006, 2008) findings of the three ideological camps that declare how Icelandic preschool teachers see the role of preschools and thus their own role. In the first camp the here-and-now perspective (child as 'being') with emphasis on developmental psychology is underlined, as is a focus on Nordic child-centeredness and the ideas of the *good childhood.* This camp can be seen as stereotypically feminine and the image is of the 'substitute mother' (Moss, 2006). The second camp includes the prospective value with more 'schoolification' and formal teaching (child as 'becoming'). This view can be connected to the 'technician' view of the teacher. Further, it is connected to

the definition of the preschool as the first school level, to a change in job title and to a greater emphasis on learning areas in the curriculum framework. Research findings also showed that the profession was insecure about whether to emphasise the caring or the teaching aspect of their work. In the third, and more recent camp, the preschool teachers' emphasis is on the integration of care giving and teaching (child as 'being and becoming') and the social pedagogy approach. Parents also seem to favour that approach, emphasising the preschool as a significant part of children's education and life-long learning. As many researchers have argued, the Nordic preschool tradition is threatened by emphasis on more 'schoolification' and is thus, as I see it, in 'flux'. Further, the ideology of the good childhood has been criticised for not being sufficient when it concerns newcomers, immigrant children, socially endangered children and children at risk.

When looking at the educational ideology embedded in democratic professionalism, the emphasis is on the socio-cultural approach where children are seen as social agents participating in constructing their own knowledge and life and the emphasis is on the 'rich child'.

The function of *social justice* is also underlined as pedagogical and ethical discussions of increasing cultural, social and economic diversities related to gender, ethnicity and class are seen as necessary. The preschool teachers are seen as researchers, reflective practitioners and leading professionals embedding documentation, dialogue, critical reflection and deconstruction in their role. Within democratic professionalism there is a strong emphasis on the ethical part of the role and that there are multiple ways of knowing and knowledge is in fact contestable.

Research findings reveal that Icelandic parents are not active partners in the preschools and that collaboration is mostly informal. Parents are seen as insecure and the preschool teachers perceive it as embedded in their role to give them advice related to the upbringing of children at home. Additionally, Nordic preschool teachers seem to be concerned about children's long days in preschools and argue that they should spend more time with their parents.

Partnership with all parents is the third level of activity of democratic professionalism. Parents are seen as partners and preschool teachers should seek their expertise and participation in decision making, underlining a relationship of openness between equals.

Leadership of preschool teachers

Many research findings reveal that preschool teachers in Iceland and elsewhere see themselves more as teachers of children than leaders of adults within

preschools. Research findings further reveal that the leadership emphasis has rather been stereotypically feminine, inter-personal and horizontal within preschools rather than hierarchical and stereotypically masculine. However, there have been trends towards the latter leadership style and emphasis in recent years, in Iceland, e.g. by establishment of the group leader's position and managerial demands. The more masculine style sometimes clashes with the historically feminine and inter-personal style bringing with it all kinds of collaborative problems. There the group leaders are as 'piggies in the middle', between positional demands from leaders 'above' them on one hand, and micropolitical behaviour of other staff 'beneath' them in the hierarchy, on the other. Power struggles of preschool teachers, especially group leaders, and assistant teachers, seem also to have commonly occurred.

The leadership associated with democratic professionalism is seen as distributed or teacher leadership and meant to take place in professional learning communities, or rather within democratic space or centres. Preschools are meant to be open forums in the community where transparency and democracy is emphasised, as well as collaboration with stakeholders and community. It takes a village to raise a child, is the motto and thus field wide leadership is also seen as preferable. The approach is thus comprehensive and leadership of preschool teachers is seen as necessary.

Affecting contextual factors

As reported in the introduction, day-care centres and playschools were amalgamated in the 1990s, and thus the educational function, the function of social justice and the economic function, were supposed to be integrated within preschools. In recent years there has been an emphasis on the educational and the teaching dimension of the preschool teachers' professional and leadership role. The education of preschool teachers was moved to university level 1997 and to M.Ed. level 2008, as was that of other teachers; subject or learning areas were defined in the curriculum framework 1999, and six basic common learning areas for all school levels was decided in 2011; there is more emphasis than before on evaluation of the preschool education and parents' councils have a defined role in expressing their views and inspecting the implementation of the curriculum. Further, the number of children within groups has increased and the decision on these factors has recently been outsourced to preschool head teachers and municipalities which can be seen as deregulation related to the effects of neo-liberalism on the preschools' public structure and frameworks.

The increasing number of children within groups, lack of preschool teachers and high turnover rate of staff, until the recession, has most likely affected the role and leadership considerably in recent decades.

Children begin younger and are staying longer in preschools, increasingly more mothers are working full-time, and Icelandic families are struggling in stressful situations. And last but not least, the 'greediness urge' and collapse of the bank system have led to great changes for families and cut-backs in preschools. A clear family policy seems to be lacking, relevant to the situation.

Professional identities of preschool teachers

From the beginning, preschools and the preschool teachers' roles, have suffered from the tensions of being both or either teachers, caregivers, nursery nurses or pedagogues. Gender affects identity, and working with young children has been seen as women's responsibility, with gendered expectations embedded in institutional life, as in society. As Witz (1992) for example argued, related to traditional professionalism, women are not men and thus, semi-professions are not seen as professions. Further, it has been argued that there is a connection between child-centredness (Langford, 2010), 'feminization of the trade' and the role of the teacher and her professionalism 'behind the scenes'. The role is thus representing the ideal mother. Additionally, preschool teachers are working in a field numerically dominated by laypersons, low-paid female assistant teachers. According to some Nordic research, preschool teachers still seem to have troubles with articulating and showing their expertise, they and assistant teachers seem to be carrying out similar activities, preschool teachers seem to see assistant teachers as having equal value to themselves but simultaneously they are struggling for acknowledgement both inside and outside preschools. Additionally, they do not seem to identify with the concept of 'leadership'. Further, it can provoke tension when a profession is construed as gendered, caring, maternal, passionate and feminine as opposed to professional, degree educated and highly trained. It is argued that in times like this, professional identities can be insecure, in flux and professions can have multiple identities.

However, in democratic professionalism preschool teachers are seen as shaping their identities primarily by themselves, emphasis is on their authority, visibility and status and they are central in constructing knowledge with the children and other stakeholders. Reconstruction of children and preschool teachers is seen as necessary, as the child-centeredness embedded in the Nordic tradition results in 'invisibility' of the female preschool teacher and her expertise and knowledge is thus

placed 'behind the scenes'. PTs are seen as having a *robust*, activist *leadership* identity and to see themselves as agents of change.

Discourses and assumptions in our society inevitably affect the professional identities of preschool teachers and can be competing, based on different ideologies. Discourses and understanding of stakeholders towards the preschool teachers' role has been defined as gendered (substitute mother), school-directed (technician) or related to democratic professionalism (teacher as researcher). Further, Sachs (2003) identified the entrepreneurial identity of teachers related to the managerial discourse as against the more activist identity related to the discourse of democratic professionalism.

3. Theoretical and methodological perspective

Like every researcher I have my personal biography, and will speak from "a particular class, gender, racial, cultural, and ethnic community perspective" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p. 21), and my beliefs about ontology, epistemology and methodology shape how I see the world and act in it (Guba, 1990; Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). The research paradigm adopted, or the "basic set of beliefs that guides action" (Guba, 1990, p. 17) is constructivist-interpretive (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005) which assumes a relativist ontology, or multiple constructed realities, and an interpretive epistemology where the knower and the known interact and shape one another. As Crotty (2003) puts it, "meaning is not discovered, but constructed" (p. 9) and "different people may construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon" (p. 9). The phenomena under study are the professional role, leadership and identity of preschool teachers.

The theoretical perspective, or the philosophical stance informing the methodology of the research, is interpretive, or 'symbolic interactionism' which stems from the pragmatist philosopher and social psychologist George Herbert Mead (1934), and in the wake, the sociologist Herbert Blumer (1969) (Crotty, 2003; Locke, 2001). As Mead (1934) argued, the self is a social structure which evolves through communication, facilitated through the use of language. Hargreaves (1975) points out that Mead's major contribution rests on his suggestion that a self develops only when a person begins to "take the role of the other" and takes to her or himself the attitudes that others take to her or him (1975, p. 8).

The central and critical idea in the symbolic interactionist position is the notion of meaning and its influence on social behaviour (Locke, 2001, p. 21). Blumer (1969, in Locke, 2001, p. 22-23) put forward a well-known understanding of the role of meaning and interpretation:

1. *People interpret the meaning of objects in the world and then act upon those interpretations*, that is, meanings inform and guide actions. It is therefore important how for example preschool teachers interpret meaning related to caring or teaching because it guides their practices in the field.

2. *Meaning arises from social action or communication between and among individuals and not from the object*. Communication is at the core of interaction and the importance of language and other symbolic interactions is therefore underlined. Preschool teachers' meanings related

to caring or teaching, according to this perspective, are constructed in communication with stakeholders e.g. children, preschool teachers, staff, leaders, parents and experts.

3. *Meaning is handled in and modified through an on-going interpretive process.* Meanings are thus not fixed or stable but continuously revised as they serve as a means to guide actions. New governmental decisions, like articles about program evaluation, or a policy of the union about concepts used in the field, like *teaching pupils* instead of *working with children*, can affect meanings of individuals as they select, suspend or even transform the meanings they had beforehand.

3.1 The methodology of the research – focus group interviews

A preschool teacher is usually a member of a reference group (Hargreaves, 1975) in whose terms she or he evaluates her- or himself and the members become her or his significant others (Mead, 1934). Thus, preschool teachers form a group within the preschool and are additionally members of a profession, but they are also a part of a preschool community and in communication with significant others, such as other staff, leaders, parents and consultants, who presumably affect their shaping or reshaping of meaning. Thus, it was seen appropriate to use *focus group interviews* in exploring the meanings of preschool teachers and relevant stakeholders, exploring how these groups' points of view are constructed and expressed (Barbour and Kitzinger, 1999), and if they are similar or, if not, how they differ. Each and everyone enters the interview with her or his individual meanings but in the discussion a co-construction of meanings will take place. Thus, the group interaction created through a focus group interview produces data that might not be available through individual interviews (Morgan, 1997) and in a focus group interview the researcher can probe for deeper understanding than is possible with questionnaires (Flick, 2006). The participants bring with them their meanings and within the group "position themselves in relation to each other as they process questions, issues and topics in focused way. These dynamics themselves become relevant 'units of analysis' for study" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p. 904). This study seeks to identify emergent themes in the discourses of all the stakeholders.

The research is conducted within a feminist standpoint perspective. Because the power dimension in society usually defines women as 'lesser' than the male and therefore usually defines a feminine profession as less important, I think it is very significant that the preschool teachers' voices and voices of the main stakeholders in early childhood education are heard in Icelandic society, and internationally as

well. Wilkinson (1998) argues that focus group interviews are suitable for feminist research because participants have more power there than in traditional research and power relations between the researcher and participants are consequently different which facilitates discussions. Also, Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002) maintain that the feminist standpoint perspective gives the opportunity to "produce the best current understanding of how knowledge of gender is interrelated with women's experiences and the realities of gender" (p. 61).

3.2 Designing focus group research

Morgan (1996) suggests that attention has to be paid both to project-level issues and group-level issues when designing the relevant focus group research. Regarding the former element the researcher has to decide about the *standardization* of questions and the *sampling*, and regarding the latter about *level of moderator involvement* and *group size*. All these factors are affected by the goals of the particular project.

3.1.1 Level of standardization

The purpose of the research is to investigate the preschool teachers' professional role, leadership and identities, as the stakeholders' view and perceptions of the same issues. The data collected in the groups will be compared up to a certain level, and therefore a certain standardization of the questions asked is necessary (Morgan, 1996). As Lichtman (2006) argues, focus group interviews can be semi-structured as in one-to-one interviews. I therefore prepared an interview guide with similar questions for all groups (Appendix 1) but was also prepared for *emergent* group discussions (Morgan, 1996) where certain themes might get closer attention and new themes could emerge. Further, I was prepared to allow open discussion between participants, as necessary for co-constructing their meanings.

3.1.2 Sampling and number of groups

According to Lichtman (2006) there is no scientific research that speaks to group size, group number or group composition of focus groups and the literature varies regarding these issues. Focus groups can be either homogeneous or heterogeneous (Robson, 2002). Homogeneous groups have a common background, position and experience which can facilitate communication, but may also result in 'groupthink'. Wibeck *et al.* (2007, quoting Billig, 1996) argue that therefore it is necessary to secure a 'spirit of contradiction' if co-construction of meaning is seen as important. Heterogeneous groups differ in background, position

and experience, which can stimulate and enrich discussions, but may risk power imbalances and lead to lack of respect for opinions expressed by some members (Morgan, 1996). As the purpose of the research is to explore the views or perceptions of many stakeholders about the professional role and leadership of preschool teachers it is appropriate to interview homogenous groups, comparing and relating their perceptions of the issues discussed, and in the end, when answering the research questions, to draw conclusions. With the aim of getting a collective picture, I selected one municipality out of six in the capital area by purposive sampling (Robson, 2002). The municipality I chose is talked about as emphasising professional issues, and within the municipality I selected three preschools out of a much larger number. I cannot be more specific about the choice and by giving more detail I would take the risk of identifying the municipality. However, the percentage of professionals is considerably higher in those three preschools than in the country's average as this might mean that the professional role is more clear and obvious than in an area where the percentage of preschool teachers is lower. The size of the preschools I chose and number of children within them is also similar and they are medium sized.

According to Krueger (1994), a focus group usually consists of six to ten participants, depending on the research purpose but the recommended number varies. To encourage rich conversation, each group was constituted of six people, two from each preschool. The groups were five in total, as can be seen in the following table 3.1:

Table 3.1. Focus groups interviewed in the research.

Group 1 **Preschool head and assistant head teachers**	Group 2 **Preschool teachers**	Group 3 **Other staff**	Group 4 **Professionals at the preschool office**	Group 5 **Parents**
One head teacher and one assistant head teacher from each of the three preschools.	One group leader and one preschool teacher from each preschool.	Two staff members from each preschool, reflecting the group of other staff.	Directors and pedagogical consultants from the preschools' office.	Two parents from the association of each preschool.

When the interviews took place one preschool assistant head teacher could not attend and in the parents' group one could not be present. However, the interviews took place as planned.

The number of focus groups is often between three and six but it varies in relation to time and other practical reasons (Krueger, 1994). The focus groups could have been selected differently, for example I could have talked to preschool teachers and group leaders in separate groups, but the size of the thesis, the time factor and possible advantages of interviewing those groups together, led to a decision to limit the number. The same factors are of relevance related to the group of head teachers and assistant head teachers. I asked the Parents' Associations in each preschool to nominate two representatives in the parents' group. Although this was a practical approach it is possible that it could have introduced some positive bias, as these parents are most often those who are rather enthusiastic in participating in the preschools' activities.

Also the number of times the researcher meets each group can vary. Usually it is a question of reaching a certain level of saturation, that is when new issues or dimensions related to the topic under discussion do not emerge anymore, and the researcher makes a decision about that matter (Flick, 2006). I had one meeting with each group but in the document of informed consent I mentioned the possibility of a second meeting, if analysis made this necessary. It did not arise.

3.1.3 Level of moderator involvement

The role of the moderator, or interviewer, is rather critical and requires great skill to secure the quantity and quality of the data (Litoselliti, 2003; Morgan, 1996; Robson, 2002; Ryan and Lobman, 2007). Krueger and Casey (2000) define categories of questions that the moderator can bear in mind in the discussions. They talk about opening, introductory, transition, key and ending questions. It is very important how the moderator starts the discussions, first with opening, practical question, where everybody introduces themselves, and then with an introductory question which is supposed to encourage conversations among participants. It can be an open-ended question, related to the subject under study, but more general. In the first focus group with the preschool head teachers and assistant head teachers, I, in the role of the moderator, began with an introductory question but the participants were eager to get straight to the 'real' questions, which had been sent to them some days before, and the same attitude occurred in almost all the groups.

Further, it is recommended to have a co-moderator (Lichtman, 2006) or assistant moderator (Krueger and Casey, 2000) in focus group interviews and one of my

masters students took on that role. I prepared my assistant as well as I could by making a handbook about focus group research and interviews from the literature, emphasising especially how the interviews were meant to develop and what we should bear in mind. According to Krueger and Casey (2000) the assistant moderator can make comprehensive notes, for example of the non-verbal behaviour, operate the tape recorder, handle the environmental conditions and respond to unexpected interruptions. It was of great help to have the assistant moderator. During the interviews she took care of those things mentioned above and wrote down in what rank the participants were speaking so those who typed the interviews later did not have to dwell on finding that out and it made the typing less expensive. As Krueger and Casey (2000) maintain, the assistant moderator is key during the post meeting analysis of the sessions. The greatest help of having an assistant moderator came through our discussions in the wake of each interview and when we met the next time we had written down our reflections and discussed them further (Appendix 2). One of the changes I made, based on a comment from an assistant preschool head teacher in the first interview and discussion with the assistant moderator, was to alter the interview questions for the preschool teachers which hopefully made them more transparent and clear. In the wake of the third interview with the group of assistant teachers I similarly added a special question to the other stakeholders 'outside' the preschool about the ATs role as they seemed very secure compared to the preschool teachers. Thus the preschool teachers, PHTs and APHTs were not asked especially about the ATs role, although the questions gave them occasion to discuss it. Indeed I think that these discussions between me and the assistant are one component in making the analytical process more trustworthy.

3.1.5 Evaluation of and reflection on the interviews

I prepared thorough guidelines for me and my assistant about the interview itself and in all the interviews the process was similar in the beginning where I explained the purpose of the research, the research process, my role and my assistant's role in the interview and what was expected of them as participants. The first stage of data gathering should, if possible, be a pilot study (Robson, 2002). According to Robson (2002) most flexible designs, meaning interviewing among other methods, can incorporate piloting within the study itself. As the timeframe was very narrow and it took quite some time to contact all the participants in the planned focus groups a special time and opportunity for pilot groups were not possible. I thus decided that the first focus group I interviewed, that of preschool head teachers and

assistant preschool head teachers, would act in a way as a pilot group allowing us to refine our techniques in running focus group interviews, particularly as I expected them to be enthusiastic story tellers. Barbour and Kitzinger (1999) recommend using a flip chart to construct a summary of the meeting with the participants and in this first focus group the assistant moderator was asked to do that. The result was not as expected and called for time consuming repetitions from the participants so we decided not to do it again. In our evaluation of the focus group interviews, my assistant and I agreed that most of the interviews had gone almost beyond expectations, except for the one with the preschool teachers. There the participants seemed more hesitant than in the other groups and did not have as many common issues to share and discuss. As this was the second group we interviewed, and the first group, who we regarded as our pilot group, was very eager to talk, I guess I was a bit unprepared for silences and caution of the participants and could have encouraged them more in the beginning of the interview. This was a reminder that I could not automatically expect that all participants were as enthusiastic to talk as the focus group of the top leaders. In relation to this a pilot focus interview specifically with preschool teachers might have been helpful.

3.1.6 Interviews with politicians

To get the broad picture of the municipality's circumstances I decided to interview two politicians individually, but did not form a focus group. I thought that if I interviewed six politicians together, they would probably act more like 'traditional politicians' in a political meeting rather than co-constructing knowledge and meaning. The two were therefore interviewed separately.

3.3 Ethical guidelines

Research ethics are about the moral values and principles that guide and underpin the whole research process (Litoselliti, 2003) and in every research project, the researcher has to have respect for democracy, truth and persons (Bassey, 1995). In my IFS I came across some difficulties regarding ethical issues by relying on the preschool head teacher as a 'gate keeper' and had not informed the participants well enough in the beginning of the research process about how the data would be used. Thus, they were unprepared and felt somewhat defenceless and unhappy (Jónsdóttir, 2008). The following procedures are built on that experience.

In this research I adopted what Lichtman (2006) defines as an 'absolute stance' (p. 58) where four central issues are emphasised: protection from physical or

psychological harm; prevention of deception; protection of privacy and informed consent. In the beginning of the process I asked for general permission from the respective municipality for carrying out the study (Appendix 3). I then contacted the preschool head teachers for their consent, informed them about the research and selecting participants and sent them an information letter which they showed to their staff (Appendix 4). I then visited the preschools, met the staff, and in collaboration with the head teacher, selected the sample. The head teachers also assisted me in contacting the Parents' Association. I got everybody's email address, and before each interview I sent the members of the relevant group a letter with informed consent, where I explained the purpose and the research methods, the research process, anonymity and confidentiality. I also explained and got their consent for dissemination of the findings and interview questions were attached (Appendix 1). Based on this information, the participants gave their personal 'informed consent' (Creswell, 2007) by signing the relevant papers on the spot before we started each interview (Appendix 5). I also contacted the directors and consultants at the preschool office and politicians, using similar procedures.

In focus group interviews, the interviewer and the interviewees are actively engaged in constructing meaning (Silverman, 2006). As discussed before I have a lot of experience from the preschool field and I tried to be aware of my meaning and how my history shapes the study (Creswell, 2007; Lichtman, 2006). Although, as will be outlined in chapter 4 on findings, not one of the preschool teachers mentioned the newly agreed decision on a Masters' degree for preschool teachers, and I did not probe for their opinion. There my position at the university could have been a barrier to open and honest discussion.

3.4 Data collection and analysis

The data gathering process took about six weeks, from October 28th to December 4th 2009. Besides the interviews in the focus groups I looked at the preschools' websites to get some information about the school curriculum and policy and used policy papers and reports of the local communities as data for informing the interviews.

In the focus group interviews I decided to interview the groups of leaders and preschool teachers first and to design the other interviews based on the experience gained in the first two, including the level of the moderator's involvement. The interviewees were asked for permission to tape-record the interviews, to which they agreed willingly. Krueger (1994) states that transcription of the data is not always necessary and that in some cases analysis can be carried out on the basis of

listening, or on the notes from the observer. Others maintain that exact transcription is necessary and that focus group interviews are more difficult to transcribe than individual interviews (Barbour and Kitzinger, 1999; Bloor *et al.*, 2001). I did both, that is I listened to the interviews carefully over and over again, and had them transcribed. Although analysing focus group data involves essentially the same process as any other qualitative data (Ryan and Lobman, 2007), the researcher needs to reference the group context. This means "striking a balance between looking at the picture provided by the group as a whole and recognizing the operation of individual 'voices' within it" (Barbour and Kitzinger, 1999, p. 16). This balance is difficult, especially when you are more used to carrying out individual interviews where the personal perspective is favoured.

When the interviews had been transcribed I began the data analysis. There I used typology analysis (Grbich, 2007, p. 46; Ryan and Lobman, 2007) which is a classification or grouping of information of particular relevance to the research questions, collating all data relating to the particular issue, identifying variations, layers and dimensions, classifying into types or subgroups. Beforehand I had prepared an emerging analytical framework (see chapter 2.6.1) and the classification or grouping were connected to the concepts *professional roles, leadership, contextual factors and discourses* and *professional identities*, as identified in the research questions. However, there was also a space for emerging themes, which were not defined beforehand in the framework. In this process Mead's (1934) and Blumer's (1968) theories on construction of meaning were also influential.

I intended to use Nvivo 8 to categorise and code the data, for the first time in my role as a researcher, but it turned out to be too time consuming to practise with the program, so I used more conventional ways of analysing the data, by using the Word program, colouring each type or theme emerging out of the data (Appendices 6 and 7). In analysing the discourses, "the dominant ways of writing and speaking about a particular topic are set in place over time and require historical tracking back to identify who has benefited from one particular discourse and how other competing discourses have been marginalised" (Grbich, 2007, p. 14). This was born in mind especially when I put on gendered lenses, and tried for example to find out if and how dominant discourses have shaped the professional identity of preschool teachers through the years. As with the groups in focus, I guess I can be unconscious and unaware of the stereotypical gendered prejudice connected to the preschool teachers' work and profession, having been a part of it, as those stereotypes are so deeply ingrained in society (Coleman, 2002).

3.5 Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) discuss the respect for truth. They talk about *trustworthiness* instead of validity and reliability in qualitative research. What they mean, among other things, is that the provision of data has to be built on trust, the records of interviews are accurate, there has been sufficient triangulation, and the account of the research is detailed enough to give the reader confidence in the findings. Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) dispute the usefulness of triangulation, claiming that the central image should be the crystal, not the triangle. "Crystals are prisms that reflect externalities and refract within themselves, creating different colours, patterns, arrays, casting off in different directions" (Richardson, 2000, cited in Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p. 6). In the crystallisation process the writer tells the same tale from different points of view (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). By interviewing all the relevant parties related to the professional roles, leadership and identities of preschool teachers and by using the emerging analytical framework, focusing on the different views, perception and the rhetoric of the stakeholders, my aim was to secure crystallisation. Also by having an assistant moderator with me in the focus group discussions, I had a second pair of 'ears and eyes' in the data collection, and I argue that it strengthened the trustworthiness of the whole process. When the interviews had been transcribed I sent them back to each participant and asked them to comment on the content and especially mark out where they did not want me to quote them directly. Nine participants reacted to the letter and two of them made special comments about quotations which was taken notice of.

In the next chapter I will present the findings of the focus groups' interviews and the individual interviews with the two politicians.

4. Findings

In this chapter I will introduce the main findings of the focus group research among stakeholders in three preschools in one municipality in Iceland and individual interviews with two politicians of the municipality.

Built on the purpose, the research questions are as follows:

1. How are the professional role and leadership of preschool teachers currently perceived by them and by other stakeholders in preschool education in Iceland?
2. What contextual factors are currently perceived by preschool teachers to be affecting their professional role and leadership?
3. How do the preschool teachers see their professional identity and how do stakeholders' current perceptions of their role and leadership, and relevant contextual factors, appear to affect their professional identity?

In analysing the data I will focus on the features in the emerging analytical framework (see subsection 2.6.1) in relation to the main concepts under study. Further, I have Mead's (1934) and Blumer's (1969) symbolic interactionism in mind where the ideology is that continuously revised meanings, occurring from social interaction or communication with others, inform and guide actions.

The structure of this fourth chapter is based on the focus group discussions of group leaders and preschool teachers, who formed one focus group. I will generally refer to these occupational groups as preschool teachers, but may identify them separately where appropriate in the findings. The views of other stakeholders: preschool head teachers; assistant head teachers; assistant teachers; parents; professionals at the preschool office and politicians, enable the presentation of a rounded picture and shed light on the perceptions and understandings affecting the meanings of the group in focus. I will present my findings in a structure derived from the themes emerging in the data but the presentation of the findings further relates to the three research questions above, as the following table 4.1 illustrates:

Table 4.1. Structure of the findings.

Subsections	Issues and research questions
4.1 Professional role and leadership of preschool teachers - 4.1.1 Professional role of preschool teachers - 4.1.2 Elements strengthening the professional role of PTs - 4.1.3 Expertise of preschool teachers and collaboration with other practitioners - 4.1.4 Collaboration of parents and preschool teachers - 4.1.5 Leadership of preschool teachers and the preschools' hierarchy	How preschool teachers and other stakeholders see the professional role. How preschool teachers and stakeholders see the leadership of those groups and the hierarchical structure within the preschools. This section is the longest in the current chapter and is related to the first research question.
4.2 Contextual factors affecting the professional and leadership role of preschool teachers - 4.2.1 Too many children in the groups - 4.2.2 The preschool as service to parents	Views of preschool teachers and stakeholders on these issues that the PTs perceived as hindering and negative towards their role. This section is related to the second research question.
Professional identities of preschool teachers - 4.3.1 How do stakeholders see the role of PTs versus roles of ATs and other professionals? - 4.3.2 Stakeholders' perceptions of the leadership role of preschool teachers - 4.3.3 Underlying attitudes to gender connected to the role and leadership of preschool teachers - 4.3.4 How do preschool teachers see their professional and leadership identities?	How stakeholders' perceptions affect the professional identity of PTs and how they perceive their identity as well. This section is related to the third research question.

4.1. Professional role and leadership of preschool teachers

The three functions of early childhood education: economic, educational and the achievement of social justice (Vandenbroeck *et al*, 2010) are inevitably in tension with each other and Vandenbroeck *et al.* (2010) argue that "harmonious compromises between them are probably never to be achieved" (2010, p. 149). In the following sections these functions play an important role when shedding light on perceptions of the relevant stakeholders and they act as deep foundations of perceptions and feelings. There also seemed to be a link between how the stakeholders see the role of the preschools on one hand and the role and expertise of preschool teachers on the other.

Separating discussion about roles, leadership and identities of the preschool teachers, in the following sections, has been complicated. As Sachs (2003)

explains: "[I]dentities organise the meaning whereas roles organise the functions" (2003, p. 126). Performing certain roles can affect identities, and vice versa, identities can affect roles. However, the discussion will be as separate as possible, although reference between sections is unavoidable. As I am focusing both on 'informal' and 'formal' or 'positional' leadership of preschool teachers, there is inevitably some overlap also between sections related to the leadership concept.

The following sections (4.1.1 to 4.1.5) are related to the first research question: *How are the professional role and leadership of preschool teachers currently perceived by them and by other stakeholders in preschool education in Iceland?*

4.1.1 Professional role of preschool teachers

Views of preschool teachers on their role

When asked about their professional role the focus group of *preschool teachers* (PTs) predominantly focused on their *educational* role with the children and there they perceived themselves as professionals and experts. They did not stress their professional leading role with other staff as is anticipated in the Preschool Act (90/2008) or as is expected in democratic professionalism (Oberhuemer, 2005). This is in accordance with many research findings revealing that preschool teachers see themselves mainly as teachers or carers of children but not as leaders working with adults (see e.g. Hard, 2008; Jónsdóttir, 2001; Rodd, 2006).

Neither did they discuss dimensions related to the function of social justice and diversity as defined by Vandenbroeck (2009), except where they touched upon special needs teaching. However, they mentioned their collaborative role towards the parents, which is seen as important e.g. in the literature on democratic professionalism (Oberhuemer, 2005; Whitty, 2008), as will be discussed in section 4.1.3.

The PTs, including those that were group leaders (GLs), used the concepts *educating, teaching, care giving and learning*, to describe their professional role. They emphasised communication and relationships with the children and considered that all education and learning took place through, or was embedded in, those interactions. If these interactions were not satisfactory an essential part was missing and it was difficult to develop or add to the children's knowledge or competences. It was also considered important for the children to learn to communicate and interact with one another, to show each other respect and to learn social skills. The participants in the focus group explained how already at one year old children were starting to show this understanding:

> Somebody plods along a doll and if she loses it the other children fetch it and give it to her because they know she needs it ... This is pure respect for each other and intimacy, great interaction and they have already learnt it ... They are unbelievable, they hand to each other, and they comfort each other. I don't know where these kids are coming from; you can almost see the wings and the circle of light.

Preschool teachers working with the youngest children talked about care giving as one of their main roles and thought it was as important as any other action because of the learning possibilities and teaching embedded in it. In care giving the children were encouraged, they learnt to associate and they experienced they were loved, allowed to cry and be hugged. The children's progress was huge, particularly in language acquisition and social learning, and the preschool teachers talked about it as a privilege to work with the youngest ones.

The prevailing rhetoric of the preschool teachers about their *educational role* with the children can be related to the social pedagogy approach (Bennett, 2005), based on the ideology of the here-and-now perspective, the good childhood and Nordic child-centeredness (Kristjánsson, 2006), and the integration of teaching and care giving, or Einarsdóttir's third camp (2006, 2008). There it is argued that care giving and teaching within a play-based learning environment are mutually inclusive concepts. Further, the child was seen 'as being and becoming' (Uprichard, 2008). The PTs also emphasised the children's happiness and well-being (Hreinsdóttir, 2009; Karlsdóttir and Einarsdóttir, 2004), social skills and satisfying interpersonal relationships. When describing how the learning took place the understanding of the 'rich' child (Moss *et al.*, 2000) and of teachers as researchers (Moss, 2006, 2008) was apparent, as was the rhetoric of the socio-cultural approach (Langford, 2010; Oberhuemer, 2005). Nevertheless, they did not mention pedagogical documentation, dialogue, critical reflection, research or evaluation especially as a part of their role, nor critical debates on e.g. gender, ethnicity or other issues related to social justice (Dahlberg *et al.*, 2007; Moss, 2006, 2008). The preschool teachers all sensed the parents' demands were in accordance with how the preschool teachers performed their role (Einarsdóttir, 2006; Jónsdóttir, 2005).

The participants discussed also the role of formal teaching and early intervention. They did not like formal teaching of letters three times a week as they knew was done in one preschool, but saw literacy as a normal part of everyday learning of four and five year old children in circle times and meal times, when working with sounds and listening in the daily flow. However, one participant emphasised that the formal demands about children's learning had become stronger in society, from the primary school and parents than 15 years ago when she started working. "They are supposed to be cleverer now", she said. She connected this view to a new

curriculum for the oldest children and to the earlier diagnostic screening for difficulties. Nevertheless, none of them would go as far in the preparation for primary school as teaching the children to read in formal ways. Thus they did not want to "fiddle with the clock of childhood", as Kristjánsson (2006) mentions related to the prospective value.

A preschool teacher in charge of special needs teaching within one of the preschools thought that preschool teachers were a bit inconsistent in their stance, because they were really testing the children and emphasising early intervention:

> What about the early intervention we are always talking about. You know, starting early. We are testing five years old children (Another participant added: Much sooner) ...yes, looking for reading difficulties ... and the children that are doing bad, we are working with them the whole winter and then we check them again and they are maybe still doing bad and then we hand them over to the primary school ... This child needs special attention and you know, I don't see it as a bad thing ... We are making the primary school more easy for the child.

In the discussion some of the preschool teachers perceived it as necessary to use early intervention in form of testing the phonological awareness of the older children. This ideology and methods can rather be related to the prospective value (Kristjánsson, 2006) and the child 'as becoming' (Uprichard, 2009) where the preschool is dealing with educational inequalities and as a result an educational gap is filled and problems prevented (Vandenbroeck *et al.*, 2010). As Jensen *et al.* (2010) argue, many decisions made by the municipal authorities on language acquisition, early literacy and screening for language deficits might move the educational practice away from the Nordic model and the social pedagogy approach towards more 'schoolification', technicality and 'what works'. In the focus group of the preschool teachers these approaches were talked about as different and there did not seem to be a tension between them in the participants' minds and they did not perceive the latter as threatening the ideology and practice of the Nordic model.

Vandenbroeck (2009) argues that although diversity and social inclusion is still denied in some places, in general, the early childhood community today cannot reasonably claim to focus on the 'average' child anymore. However, in the PTs discussion their rhetoric was in fact focused on the 'average' child. The function of social justice was almost invisible in their rhetoric as were matters of e.g. gender, ethnicity, class or equality and socially endangered children were not discussed (Jensen, 2009; Wagner *et al.*, 2008).

Views of assistant teachers

The *assistant teachers* (ATs) seemed to be well informed about the preschools' policy and ideology and talked freely about their *educational* role with the children.

The ATs used the concepts *teaching, care giving, relationships* and *respect* and when talking about the educational role with the children, there was a harmony in theirs and the preschool teachers' rhetoric. They perceived that they were always teaching, including in the care giving and the children were learning while they were playing. 'Learning by doing', one of them said, and the others agreed and laughed. They discussed their pedagogical methods, how they talked to the children and how the children talked to them, and that they were role models in the preschools and they really seemed to enjoy talking about their work with the children.

In many ways the assistant teachers talked like 'researchers' (Moss, 2006, 2008) as included in democratic professionalism. An example of the 'researcher's' view was when one of them described how she enjoyed especially being with the children in organised hours, seeing how creative they were, experiencing what they were thinking and studying, and listening to what they were talking about. She enjoyed working with them on environmental issues and they were eager to learn more and more, as one of them said:

> Children want to discover knowledge; it is fun to seize the opportunity, have some freedom to experiment.

Views of preschool head teachers and assistant preschool head teachers

The *preschool head teachers* (PHTs) and *preschool assistant head teachers* (PAHTs) mainly underlined the *educational* function of preschools and those who worked with many preschool teachers thought it was a huge privilege. Temporarily they thought it was necessary to emphasise the care giving part of the educational role because of the present impact of the social situation and the recession and they thought it was to the benefit of the children. On the other hand, they perceived that the majority of parents, and especially the politicians, saw the preschool as a service to working adults: "They see the preschool as service, care and education, in that order", and they did not like it. There the PHTs and PAHTs expressed tensions related to the different functions of preschools in the society, especially the educational and economic (Vandenbroeck, 2009).

Views of parents

The *parents* seemed to agree, in general, with the preschool teachers' *educational* emphasis of the preschools, as the PTs perceived they did. The parents talked about the preschool as an important first school level where children learn social skills while they are playing and communicating with other children, as other Icelandic research findings have shown (Einarsdóttir, 2008, 2010). They meant that children should be allowed to be children and should not be stuffed with information

when they were so young, as this would happen gradually, and they should also be allowed to find out things themselves. However, looking into the future, one parent thought that there would be more demands for formal teaching for the five year old children and commented that the Nordic countries were the only ones starting school so late. All parents agreed that although the main role of preschools and preschool teachers was teaching and upbringing, the most important thing, number one, two and three, was the children's well-being in the preschool, as parents generally appreciate (Björgvinsson *et al.*, 2009):

> When the parents sense that the children are happy and content, then they are at ease, but as soon as the children show any signs of being unhappy or discontented, the situation is not so good.

The parents also mentioned the time at the beginning and the end of the day as extremely important and felt that it determined their attitude towards the preschool, although they were told that the child was content during the day. They were thus valuing informal collaboration (Garðarsdóttir and Einarsdóttir, 2007). Parents of children that needed diagnosing and special needs teaching were very pleased with the service, such as the meetings with the teams of relevant experts and they praised the specialists within the preschools and the preschools' office. Surprisingly the parents did not bring up the *economic* function of the preschool and were not asked about it in the interview, as it did not seem to be of relevance at that time. As mentioned in the methodological section there could be a positive bias in the parents' focus group as they were all sitting on the boards of the parents' associations.

Views of professionals at the preschool office

In the group of the pedagogical and special teaching *directors and consultants* within the preschool office they noted the preschool as *educational*, offering opportunities for *social justice* as well as *economic* as a place where children stayed while their parents were at work, but one of the consultants said:

> The preschool is from the beginning to the end in place one, two and three for the children and their needs rather than of many others. Yes, I put their needs in front of the needs of their parents for day care ... totally and it should never be forgotten.

They thought that the parents' views were changing and that they saw the preschool more as an educational provision now than before, but they perceived also that there were great demands for more service from the parents, e.g. about the children staying for longer days in preschools. When asked how the work between the pedagogical and special teaching directors and consultants connected,

it emerged that on a daily basis they worked in two separate worlds but according to them the connection was more within the preschools.

Views of politicians

The politicians stressed different emphases when talking about the main role of the preschools, maybe understandably, because one of them came from the political majority and the other one from the minority; one of them was female and the other one was male. Nevertheless I am talking about them as 'they' or the 'politicians' except where their views differed.

The politicians thought that the preschool was seen as the first school level by most people and it had a very important role, shaping individuals at a delicate age for the future and that staff should be more aware of that important role. They underlined that the role of preschools was the basic *education* and *upbringing* of children, as today the majority of children were staying there eight hours and even longer each day, but the *economic* function was also important, as one of them said:

> ... but let's not forget and at this point the discussion can become a bit tough because we are talking about principles ... the other basic role is that [preschools] are places where children are staying while their parents are at work ... and when the preschool is closed or cannot be operated because of some reasons then everything goes crazy. It takes much longer time for the professional role not to function. This is the ice-cold reality.

One of the politicians stated that "we have to be down to earth when we are talking about a school". According to him the preschool teachers maintained that the preschool education lasted eight hours daily and they always added that they were no child-minders. There the tension between the functions of preschools (Vandenbroeck *et al.*, 2010) was brought up again. In the future one of the politicians could see the preschool as compulsory for children from four years old, that the teaching would be goal directed, as in primary schools, and the children would learn to read before they arrived there.

Summary

The *preschool teachers* (PTs) predominantly focused on their *educational* role with the children and there they perceived themselves as professionals and experts. The ideology informing the PTs role revealed strong connections to the Nordic tradition but trends related to the 'rich child', teacher as researcher and the socio-cultural approach, as categorised within democratic professionalism, could also be observed, both in the views of the PTs and the ATs. In the investigation of the rhetoric of the stakeholders the ATs and parents agreed with the preschool teachers' ideology, and this was in accordance with the preschool teachers'

perceptions. Many researchers within the Nordic countries have underlined that the Nordic tradition and the social pedagogical approach needs development, and perceive that 'schoolification' is threatening the Nordic model, the social pedagogy approach and the good childhood. The preschool teachers did not seem to have similar perceptions but were able to work with the dimensions side by side. However, their rhetoric was focused on the 'average' child and by not discussing ethically the increasing cultural, social and economic diversities of society and social inclusion within preschools the professionalism of the preschool teachers falls short of being categorised as democratic in Oberhuemer's terms (2005).

In perceptions of role, tensions between various functions of preschools in society have been obvious (Vandenbroeck *et al.*, 2010). The preschool teachers and other groups within the preschools mostly stressed the *educational* function, and touched upon the function of *social justice*, in relation to special needs teaching, but the further from the preschools' activity the stakeholders were placed the more they saw the functions simultaneously as *educational* and *economic*, and this different emphasis caused tensions between the stakeholders. According to the focus groups the 'general' educational roles and the 'special needs teaching' roles, seemed to be practiced as split functions, both within the preschools and the preschool office.

4.1.2 Elements strengthening the professional role of preschool teachers

Views of PTs

The *preschool teachers* mentioned important factors that had enhanced their sense of professionalism and consciousness and strengthened their professional role. These issues were connected mostly to their *educational role* and the *educational* function of preschools and there both the preschool office, and especially the preschool head teachers, played an important leading role (Siraj-Blatchford and Manni, 2005). Within the municipality some of the PTs had been working on curriculum issues and attending inspiring courses and within the preschools many of them had been participating in developmental projects. They agreed about the importance of the preschool head teacher's role as a leader of educational work, inspiration and motivation in participating in developmental projects, calling the tune and pushing them outside the comfort zone, for example by encouraging them to become mentors of preschool teacher students. A group leader said:

> It all depends on them, I perceive it that way, if and how they lead ... Not that we are powerless but if we don't get any feedback then nothing happens, then it goes no further.

They also added that the head teachers could not make things happen if they did not have the preschool teachers with them in the team. In one of the preschools the groups were supposed to introduce in staff meetings, or on organising days, how they worked with the philosophy of the school and although they knew each other very well it had been rather challenging to explain the schedule and how they embedded the values and worked with the environmental education. A preschool teacher said:

> Although you work with those women daily then I somehow get more practice and see that my colleagues are doing great things (another participant: I see where you are going) ... and welcoming guests and students and present the preschool ... to stand up to what you are doing and why and how you do it. It is just fffff (Another participant: to phrase it) ... yes, exactly!

Although, the leading role of the head teacher is important, this can be seen as a rather traditional leadership perspective (Siraj-Blatchford and Manni, 2005) and not in accordance with newer ideas on distributed or teacher leadership (e.g. Harris, 2008; Harris and Muijs, 2004; Spillane, 2006).

The PTs also felt that general discussion about children had increased in the media and society, that research was now more accessible, and there was more contact between various educators and preschool teachers, embodied in conferences, courses and continuing development, and that preschool teachers had become more professional. A group leader said:

> Thus the discussion increases and becomes more open. We know more about what we are doing and what is professional practice ... and what is expected of us. I think we are more professional now ... that is my perception.

The preschool teachers certainly did not view themselves as semi-professionals (Etzioni, 1969), but rather as a competent profession according to their definition of their professional role. They did not express any insecurity as Einarsdóttir's (2003) findings reveal, and had not embedded the primary school vocabulary into their discourse (Jónsdóttir, 2005c), as the Preschool Teachers' Union had recommended.

Views of PHTs and APHTs

The *preschool head teachers* and *assistant preschool head teachers* agreed about the preschool office's good professional work, e.g. around curriculum, evaluation and policy making, and that developmental projects were a good way to utilise the resources and expertise within preschools and there the preschool

teachers were in leading positions. They praised the meetings with the professionals which were now in jeopardy because of the cut-back of meetings in the wake of the financial collapse.

The head teachers thought of themselves as strong leaders, having developed a clear policy and curriculum (Siraj-Blatchford and Manni, 2005). There was an agreement within the focus group that the administrative and financial part of the head teachers' role affected the professional part of it. The administrative issues were time-consuming; there was a constant disturbance and busy activity the whole day through. There was more surveillance on behalf of the preschool office and politicians which was stressful because it included a heavy workload, e.g. writing reports, which was always at short notice. One head teacher mentioned that when she started twelve years ago she planned to participate in the children group activities but today she was unable to because of the heavy weight of administrative tasks and workload:

> I wanted to do that, to get acquainted with the daily work. Today I perceive that I cannot stay in the children's groups, there are always some tasks waiting.

The perceptions they described match with managerial professionalism as in Whitty's (2008) typology, and de-professionalization (Hargreaves, 2000; McCulloch, 2001) because it seem to hinder the preschool head teachers from spending acceptable time on the professional role and educational function of the preschools, and this in turn is likely to affect the professional roles of preschool teachers.

Views of professionals at the preschool office

The pedagogical director (PD) and the pedagogical consultants' (PCs) descriptions of their work were in harmony with the views of the professional groups already quoted (PTs, PHTs, and APHTs) about professional work, policy making, evaluation and curriculum.

A pedagogical consultant mentioned that the preschool teachers were more secure about their *educational* role now than some years ago and asked less for mentoring or advice. The explanation could be that the office had organised a lot of courses through the years and extended the professional development of the preschool teachers. In recent years, the lack of staff had taken all their time but now the situation had changed. At the same time conflicts and communication problems in the staff groups seemed to have expanded and they got more requests related to them now. As an example she mentioned insecurity about teaching methods and difficulties in distributing information. There she seemed to be describing leadership problems rather than those that were strictly educational.

Another consultant added that she had worked more with the staff groups than the head teachers and emphasised working with professional issues and discussions rather than problems. An example of request from the staff was how they could make the building corner more interesting and how the environment could become more educational. She wanted more professional discussions in the preschools and felt that preschool teachers should become more active in writing about what they were doing and that they should make early childhood education still more visible. There she was calling for activists (Sachs, 2001, 2003) with agency and suggesting that the preschool teachers' professionalism and expertise should not be situated 'in the shadow', 'invisible' or 'behind the scenes' (Langford, 2010; Nørregård-Nielsen, 2005; Steinnes, 2007). Other participants did not completely agree with her and perceived that they had managed to make the preschool education visible and respected in the municipality.

Summary

The preschool teachers saw themselves becoming more professional, the preschool head teachers talked about them as in leading positions, and the professionals within the preschool office agreed that they were more secure in their educational role than before. The leading role of the preschool head teachers was seen as crucial in this process and the rhetoric of the preschool teachers revealed that where the head teacher encouraged and developed a professional learning community (e.g. Stoll and Louis, 2007) the perception of professionalism and the performance of the professional role was strengthened.

There seemed to have been some kind of professional network in the community in strengthening the educational work within the preschools and advertising it in the municipality, which can be related partly to the ideology of democratic professionalism, thus connecting the preschools and the community (Gopinathan *et al.*, 2008). Such action can also be related to Goffin and Washington's (2007) leadership of the whole field of early childhood education, suggesting that there is a need to move beyond reliance on individual leaders with the purpose of affecting political decision-making and making use of influence when relevant.

4.1.3 Role of PTs in relation to other practitioners and professionals

Views of PTs

When the *preschool teachers* were discussing their role within the preschools in relation to the roles of others they seemed overall content with the work of the assistant teachers and one of them said that the experienced ones were "as

precious as professionals on the job" and they often came with great suggestions. The collaboration between the preschool teachers and the assistant teachers could be seen as running effortlessly as it was not a focus for discussion. The findings therefore did not indicate any conflicts between those groups unlike the findings in my former research (e.g. Jónsdóttir, 2009) where there were constant power struggles between preschool teachers and assistant teachers, and the ATs often felt subordinated, especially when the professionals made their expertise and leadership visible.

Instead, in this research a preschool teacher said she was concerned about the preschool teachers' positions and roles when the preschools were buying other experts into the preschools to teach the children temporarily in areas like dancing, sport, music, art and crafts or philosophy. Those teachers arrived in the preschools and went away again when they had finished teaching their lessons and were not connected to the daily work and flow of the preschool activities in other respects. A preschool teacher said:

> I am not downgrading those teachers ... although they are doing a great job I question this arrangement because I think that preschool education should be fluid, that all the items in the programme are connected and overlapping and I also argue that we are educated to teach children up to six years old and if you can't do it then somebody within the structure should be able to be in charge of these lessons ... It scares me if we accept that we can't teach sport or music ... that it is better that somebody else does it.

Some participants agreed with that opinion but others were more sceptical and it seemed they had not thought much about it. Some liked the inspiration that came with new subjects, like dancing and yoga, and felt that it was the preschool teachers' responsibility to work with the subjects on their own. They also discussed the situation when e.g. a sport teacher was among the permanent staff and thought it was a better arrangement than having somebody just coming and going once a year. Nevertheless it was necessary to reflect on this development and how the politicians reacted to it. They also discussed whether they should spend the preschools' limited finance to buy in other experts' work. They felt it could weaken their professional status, as they could teach those activities themselves: "How much are we going to pay somebody else to sing Father Jacob with the kids?" one of them said. In the end the preschool teachers agreed that they should learn from the experts that were teaching those subjects and develop their own expertise, as they did when one of them went to a course and brought back new knowledge. At last one of them said: "Now we steal the discs from the dance teacher and do it ourselves next year!" (they laugh).

The fact that other professionals were performing parts of the educational role of preschool teachers seemed to be threatening to their expertise and how they saw their role but they seemed to be calm and easy about the ATs performing their educational role in general.

Views of ATs

The *assistant teachers* were very much at ease and secure in their roles within the groups and did not perceive themselves as *just* assistant teachers. Besides, they underlined that their job description was the same as the preschool teachers' and the only things the preschool teachers did and they did not was having interviews with the parents and having preparation time. Mostly it was collaboration side by side where the tasks and activities were similar. Thus, the ATs sensed their educational role in a similar manner to the PTs, indicating that the position of preschool teachers and assistant teachers, as the lowest groups of the hierarchy, was equal.

The ATs wondered if the recession would have an effect on their role but were hoping that the preschools would not turn into "children's storages" or "day-care centres" again. They liked the educational emphasis, they had also been encouraged lately to attend courses and as one of them said: "I think we will become more and more professional".

Views of parents

The *parents* had decisive opinions about the expertise of preschool teachers although they were not in total agreement with each other. One parent thought that the preschool could learn from the primary school to become more systematic and structured in connection to the roles of preschool teachers and assistant teachers:

> ... it is not necessary that everyone is a preschool teacher; they should take care of the planning of the work, teach and be professionally responsible ... You do not necessarily need preschool teachers for example during the lunchtime or in the free play outside. I do not quite understand the role of the assistant teachers … they need to have full licence to work in the preschools and not to be frightened about preschool teachers are taking over their job, they should be allowed to take courses and be respected as such.

Thus the PTs would take care of the 'formal' teaching and the ATs about care giving and the free play, which is not in accordance with the integrated social pedagogy approach (Broström, 2006). Another parent agreed and argued that if the goals were clear then many qualified individuals could fulfil them, for example sitting with her child when cutting with scissors or watching the children play. She added that an experienced assistant teacher could be more competent than a preschool

teacher and ATs were necessary because they brought in different perspectives. The third one said that the education of the staff was not a big deal for her. If the individual loved to be with children and liked to see their success and achievement, she did not mind the education and the fifth one emphasised a good recruitment process of staff and there all of them agreed. This view that education of the workforce did not matter can be connected to the gendered image of the worker as *substitute mother* (Moss, 2006) which is connected to 'care work' where little or no education is needed to undertake the work, and further to Einarsdóttir's (2006, 2008) first camp, emphasising the role of preschool as providing care, emotional and social support, and the preschool years as the golden age of free play and development. One parent disagreed with the others and argued that there should be educated staff in every position and the assistant teachers should be able to take courses to become more qualified:

> I would personally work with an individual who could tell me that this child has some difficulties and needed support or special teaching ... otherwise we close the window that is often open in the preschool.

The parents argued that they had seen the whole range, e.g. a twenty year old girl with no experience or education who the child and the parents loved, and a preschool teacher who could not connect to the children, and the other way around. In the end it seemed to be the person or the character that counted the most.

Views of professionals at the preschool office

Just like the parents, the *directors* and *consultants* thought it could depend on the personality, if preschool teachers, other than those in group leaders' positions, were strong professional leaders or not, and if assistant teachers were working with the children or taking care of more practical work.

They discussed further who should take care of certain activities in the preschools. One of them said: "I think it is awful when the assistant teacher is reading to the children while the preschool teacher is sweeping the floor!" "But he can be a great storyteller while the preschool teacher is not", another one answered. "If both of them are good then it does not matter who is reading", the third one said. The fourth one argued that what mattered was that the group leader was aware of the human resources within the group and used the resources for the children's benefit, independent of if it was a preschool teacher or assistant teacher's qualification and they all seemed to agree to that, as they were seeing the groups lowest in hierarchy as one unified group. As Nørregård-Nielsens' (2005) findings revealed, Danish pedagogues intended to distinguish themselves from other staff in

the preschools when they graduated but at the same time they perceived it as intolerable to let the assistants do the domestic work, like sweeping the floors. That was something the preschool could not be recognized for, because the assistant teachers "…are not second class people" (2005, p. 160).

The directors and consultants agreed that they were making huge demands of the assistant teachers, hiring them in preschool teachers' positions and sometimes as group leaders. One participant argued that when group leaders were putting the new assistant teacher in charge of the whole group in circle time, *without* teaching her or him how to operate, they were downgrading their own expertise, because knowledge and competence was needed to be in charge of such activity. They perceived that the shortage and constant change of staff in recent years was to blame but it could be done more professionally now, and according to the recruitment plan.

The professionals at the preschool office did not like the development of hiring specialists from other professions into the preschools, teaching this and that, and one participant blamed it on the preschool teachers' inferiority complex:

> I think we are far too vulnerable towards somebody who is not a preschool teacher. If we hear about gymnastic teacher we are enthusiastic to hire him in the gymnastic hall, even if her or him has no experience in working with children ... you know, where are we going to end up as group leaders and preschool teachers if we think that everybody is better than us ... there is so much inferiority complex in this profession, somehow it doubts itself.

Like the preschool teachers, the professionals at the preschool office accepted the professional position of the ATs but saw other professionals as threatening. And blamed it on the PTs' inability to value themselves for the lack of response to that development.

Views of politicians

The *politicians* liked to see other groups of people in the preschools, both professionals and experienced individuals, besides the preschool teachers whom they respected totally, as one of them said:

> We have to have ordinary people in the preschools; we need diversity ... people that do not speak Icelandic, that is the multicultural factor and we have those children within preschools ... experienced mothers and grandmothers, a lot of people with lot of qualities.

The politician argued that other staff than teachers had done a great job in primary schools, making the school more home-like, although their positions were fewer now during the recession period. There was a space for other professionals in the preschools because they could never be occupied only by preschool teachers

and their presence could be a strength not a weakness. Because of his emphasis on the importance on more movement and gymnastic in preschools he said:

> I would like to see more of sports and physical activities within the preschools, and more experts in sport and health sciences.

The other one said he did not mind if it was a professional or assistant teacher who took care of the teaching in pre- and primary schools: "It is not the same thing to be a teacher and know how to teach". The important thing was to be competent in communicating and although you were educated it was different how people managed that.

Summary

The preschool teachers, as with other groups of stakeholders, saw the ATs as an accepted group within the preschools and did not have any worries about them threatening their professional role. In some incidences preschool teachers and assistant teachers, as the lowest group in the hierarchy, were talked about as one joined group. On the other hand, hiring other professionals, especially temporarily, was seen as a threat. Despite the number of preschool teachers within these preschools under investigation it seems relevant to quote Moyles (2001, quoting Moyles and Suschitzky, 1995) again as in my IFS study (Jónsdóttir, 2008). There I argued that a clearer definition of equality and further discussions about roles were certainly needed, with the purpose of "raising the standards within the settings through acknowledgement of different roles, experience and expertise" (2001, p. 81). In fact some messages both from the parents and the politicians can be seen as downgrading the PTs expertise and professionalism and it seems to be a reason for the preschool teachers to worry. The preschool teachers were not seen as leading professionals by these stakeholders who also did not appear to call especially on their expertise. It can also be argued, based on the parents' views that the preschool teachers have not managed to explain clearly enough what is inherent in their professional role and expertise.

4.1.4 Collaboration of parents with preschool teachers

As discussed above, partnership with parents is seen as a very important level of activity in democratic professionalism (Oberhuemer, 2005; Whitty, 2008). Further, research indicates that meaningful partnership of staff and parents in preschools is important for the well-being and learning of the children (e.g. Knopf and Swick, 2007; Weiss, Caspe and Lopes, 2008).

Views of PTs

The preschool teachers argued that the greatest changes in the last decades had been the collaboration and communication with parents of preschool children and it had affected the development of their professional role. In the "old days" children had to stay the whole day in day-care centres out of need and their parents did not make great demands. There the preschool teachers were supposed to show care and think of the children's hygiene needs and in the part-time playschools the children were supposed to bring home some handicrafts. Today, parents can choose the duration of their child's stay; they make more demands about their children's competences; they are more conscious and informed and claimed far more transparency. For example, all information is now supposed to be on the preschool's website.

The participants in the focus group agreed that preschool teachers overall had made the parents more aware of the importance of the first years and further, they had advertised the preschools' educational policies so it was more easy for the parents to choose their child's preschool:

> I think that one of the reasons is that preschool teachers have been fighting and making the activity more visible ... that the demands from the parents can be connected to our actions ... we have made the importance of preschool education more apparent and from there a circle has developed.

There the preschool teachers saw themselves as having authority, significance and agency and seemed well prepared to be change agents and advocates for their programs (Bandura, 1997; Sachs, 2001, 2003; Woodrow, 2008).

An issue the PTs did not totally agree upon was their role related to advising parents about children's behavioural problems at home or how far they should go in that direction. Again it was a preschool teacher, who was in charge of the special needs teaching within her preschool, who initiated the discussion. She wondered if preschool teachers were interfering or giving advice regarding the parents' upbringing of their children, or maybe "sticking their nose into the families' affairs", e.g. when a child did not dress him or herself, or had toilet or sleeping problems and sometimes they told parents how they could use reward systems to succeed. Often the parents asked for advice because they were insecure in their role (Sæmundsdóttir and Karvelsdóttir, 2008) and did not know what they should do. The others said they often discussed with the leader of special needs teaching within the preschool before they gave the parents advice but they had to read and respect the parents' borders and consider when parents should go somewhere else for advice. One participant did not agree with the group and thought it was a gray

area to advice parents about how they should act at home; the messages had to be simple and clear so the parents did not come back and say that the advice did not work. It was felt that it was not the preschool teachers' role to change parents.

The views of the preschool teachers can be related to Urban's (2008) discussion about the preschool teachers' technical or relational perception of their practice. They sometimes desperately try to avoid uncertainty, mistakes and 'failure', constructing themselves "… in conversations with parents or in the public sphere, as 'experts' who know what to do and who are being told what to do by a knowledge-producing system that guides their practice" (Urban, 2008, p. 143).

Views of parents

The *parents' focus group* did not mention the role of preschool teachers as counsellors but had decisive opinions of how parents should act as partners in collaboration with the preschool staff (see Lawson, 2003). First they thought they should collaborate about the education and everything else connected to their child in the preschool and the groups, they should know what was going on so they could talk to their child about it and have good relationships with the staff. Further they thought that they could be more active and concerned and they mentioned a father who always swept the floor when he was fetching his child and they thought it was 'home-like'. The second issue they mentioned embedded in their role was to stand up and fight for their child's interest if they were not content, to make demands or ask for an explanation. They had sometimes questioned the activities and emphasis in the curriculum with diverse results. One parent had asked why the children should learn about the UN convention rather than e.g. playing with unit blocks and was content with the answers received. Another parent had an argument with a preschool teacher in a meeting about different interest of the sexes and was worried about boys in this female society, but felt he was not understood:

> In a meeting there was an introduction about choosing time and the children could choose to colour, do beadwork or play in the family corner and I did not assume that my boy would like it ... he wants to play with swords and shields and tin soldiers and all kinds of weapons ... and I was pointing out that the choices could appeal more to my boy and his friends but there was no understanding and when the children can bring toys from home the rules are always that there should be no weapons ... there I had a debate and did not quite agree ... this is not something that is either right or wrong ...

Following this the group discussed the need for both sexes in the staff group, as male staff members were more prepared to be boisterous with the boys and play football and so on, as one of the parents said:

> It should not be funny but you would burst into laughter if you saw the women playing football in the garden.

Although, this can be seen as stereotypical gendered perceptions, the parents seemed to be prepared to discuss equality and gender issues and that they wished to change things. The preschool teachers did not mention discussions about these issues as important in the collaboration with parents. Rather, they emphasised that their view was in harmony concerning the educational ideology and emphases within the preschools.

The parents also argued that they would wish not only to experience academic, but also a vocational emphasis in preschools like handiwork and creativity. The expertise of parents could also be used for that purpose and they mentioned the knowledge of cooking, sewing, carpentry and other necessary activities "to make society function" and that everybody should not become business administrators:

> You have all kinds of policies, like mathematic here and music there ... everything is a policy now, but maybe it had been forgotten that it is a noble activity to cook the meal as to know how to calculate and understand forms and ... maybe the role of the preschools should be widened ...

Although they admitted that parents overall were a rather passive and inactive group they were sure that parents would participate in such activities if they were asked and if they were built on their knowledge, experience and interest. "Parents are an unused resource", one of them said. This would strengthen the relationship within the children's group to learn something from your friend's mom and widen their horizon. In that connection they also thought that the preschools could be in more relationship with their neighbourhood and other generations, and grandparents could read or tell a story once in a while.

The parents seemed more connected to the community thinking (Swick and Hooks, 2005) than the preschool teachers and seemed to favour the ideology embedded in democratic professionalism on collective relationship with other stakeholders and the neighbourhood (Gopinathan *et al.*, 2008). Their rhetoric can be partly related to school as open to stakeholders and community, or as open forum (Dahlberg *et al.*, 2007; Moss, 2008) where learning is understood as a process where children, peers, teachers and families are actively, authentically and meaningfully engaged in co-construction of knowledge and skills and sharing of meanings (Langford, 2010). According to Einarsdóttir (2010) parents are not enthusiastic to participate in decision making or the preschool's activities. These parents talked more precisely about the partnership than the preschool teachers

and at least this group seemed to be ready for more participation than they were offered.

They also argued that they could possibly be more involved, advertising, writing letters, and so on, as had been done in one of the preschools with success.

In relation to their role in the parent council (Preschool Act, 90/2008) where the parents held meetings with the preschool head teachers, the parents thought that they should fight for better conditions for the children and contact the preschool office in that connection. The councils had not been put to the test yet and they felt that the head teachers would be in control of the councils' work and it was up to her or him how much authority they would have. It seemed that their role in the parents' association was often to behave like a supporting chorus but their supervision was not asked for. The parents thus felt a bit powerless in the collaboration.

Views of PHTs and APHTs

The *preschool head teachers* and *assistant preschool head teachers* discussed primarily the work with the new parent council and were a bit ambivalent about their role towards it and its significance. On the one hand they thought it was an extra workload and time-consuming to work with the committee, as they were supposed to by the Preschool Act (90/2008) but, on the other hand, they felt it could be an advantage for the preschools to participate with the parents and "…it is a sharp weapon if you choose to use it". One head teacher said:

> I think that this role will help us to improve the preschool and to enhance the parents' participation ... this is of huge importance ... I look forward to this work ... but it is time-consuming ... I think it is important to introduce the preschool activity to them ... they are unused resource that we should connect to.

It also caught their attention that the fathers were eager to sit on the parent council, probably, as one of them said, because they thought that there was some kind of authority and power embedded in the relationship with the municipality. One head teacher had already talked to the parents about the relatively few square meters per child in the preschool and that it had to be changed to lower the number of children in the groups. She felt they were interested and listened to her and she wanted them to become some kind of 'a pressure group' in societal way.

The PHTs and APHTs confirmed that they saw themselves in control of the issues and projects that the parent council discussed, also the frequency of meetings, which can go some way to explain the parents' perceptions of powerlessness.

Summary

The PTs perceive that they have made preschool activity more visible and the increased demands from parents could be seen as the result. Further, they perceive that the parents agree with the preschools' educational ideology and methods. The parents however express the view that they would like to see the preschools more as open forums where co-construction of knowledge takes place, the educational emphases would even become more vocational, the expertise of the parents could be used more and, at least for these parents, there could be more discussion of social justice issues.

By informing parents about the educational function of the preschool and becoming behavioural advisers the preschool teachers have been underlining their 'technical' expertise (Urban, 2008) rather than the relational core of their practice and the expertise and knowledge of the parents as participants in their child's education, or a relationship of openness between equals (Brooker, 2010; Garðarsdóttir and Einarsdóttir, 2007; Rodd, 2006). This stance can rather be related to the traditional professionalism than the democratic (Oberhuemer, 2005; Whitty, 2008).

4.1.5 Leadership of preschool teachers and the preschools' hierarchy

The group or class leaders within Icelandic preschools are in formal leadership positions as middle leaders, and thus the focus in this section is on their leadership and how preschool teachers overall and the stakeholders perceive it, and if they emphasise kinds of leadership other than the formal and hierarchical.

Views of PTs

All *group leaders* and *preschool teachers* in the focus group perceived that the positional leadership and management roles had increased within the groups (classes) in recent years, not the least within the biggest ones. The management work was now felt to be huge and the group leaders had to rearrange the programme and activities during the day because of changed prerequisites. However, it was noticeable that in their discussion they emphasised the management part, probably because it was stressful. Their discourse was not as much related to the leadership dimension, as leading change, staff learning and developmental work, documentation, mentoring, research and evaluation. Pedagogical dialogues on gender issues, social justice and diversity, partnership with parents (Dahlberg *et al.*, 2007; Oberhuemer, 2005) or methods connected to

professional learning communities (e.g. Stoll and Louis, 2007; Sergiovanni, 2005) were not a part of their rhetoric either. As discussed before they seemed to see the preschool head teachers as the leader of such activities although they were part of the leadership team. When asked about the difference between the leading roles of group leaders and preschool teachers they had some difficulties phrasing it: "It is difficult to ... you are like an old dog and are confusing roles" and "you have been such a long time with the same people." A group leader was more formal and said:

> The group leader is responsible for the education and that it is put into practice... but I have worked such a long time with the same people that you don't need to say anything".

Another group leader felt it was more difficult to lead preschool teachers than assistant teachers because it was harder to find out what she or he wanted and what were her or his expectations:

> Does she expect us to be equals or does she want to be subordinated? Does she want me to control her? It is a bit difficult to find this out, it takes time ... in what issues does she want me to take the lead ...She has to express her opinion; I think it is important you know what she wants... it is a question of finding some balance.

Following this the participants discussed how difficult it could be to come into a team where there has been stability for a long time. They probably forgot to mentor beginners as they should do and it could be difficult for newly qualified preschool teachers to be heard with their ideas and propositions. In the long run it all tended to depend on personal competences to communicate. The participants did not seem to be used to discussing their leadership role and there seemed to be a lack of leadership policy within the groups (classes).

When asked about the form of the hierarchical pyramid in the preschool it was described as flat or even inverted and a "friendly community of females" and they meant that the practice was not as the Preschool Teachers' Union had been preaching, that is to strengthen the pyramid and the formal positional leadership role of the group leader. Some participants perceived that they were departing from the female friendly community, that they were experts and professionals and developmental projects and professional demands kept them going as such, and professional work and friendship could both be in place. Of course it could be difficult sometimes to work with good friends; either you solved the conflicts when they appeared or you swept them under the carpet where they stayed. If the problems were not solved and they kept on disagreeing:

> ...then it comes to the class division ... you disagree but in the end the group leader or the head teacher makes the decision.

The rhetoric of the focus group revealed that the everyday stereotypically feminine collaborative leadership with its more horizontal structure prevails, but when conflict arose it was legitimate to hand the problem over to the positional leaders. As many former research findings reveal, early childhood practitioners generally favour the so-called stereotypically feminine leadership style, team-based or participative leadership (e.g. Ebbeck and Waniganayake, 2003; Muijs *et al.*, 2004).

One group leader touched upon the ideology of distributed or teacher leadership (e.g. Dana and Yendol-Hoppey, 2005; Harris, 2008) and said that in the preschool where she worked before the leadership had been fluid (insertion from another participant working there now: "everything happens effortlessly") but she thought that it could have been more division of labour there because the preschool teachers were so many:

> I am the group leader, you are in charge of the music, and you take care of this ... that we would work as collaborative leaders. I would have liked such arrangement in a preschool with so many preschool teachers.

Further, her view can be connected to the ideas of leadership capacity (Lambert, 2006) and leaderful teams and practices (Raelin, 2011; Whalley, 2006).

Views of ATs

When asked about how they saw the role of the group leaders they talked about them as supervisors or mentors and the one you ask for advice. They meant that the GLs were the heads that managed and made the final decisions, attended more meetings, but as one of them said:

> I don't think that they are here and we are there ... everywhere decisions must be made by someone so everybody is not doing it ... I like it when there is collaboration, as in our group, rather than dictatorship.

The ATs thus described the leadership within the groups as collaborative and horizontal rather than hierarchical, but as in the former focus group they mentioned the GLs authority in decision-making, thus acknowledging their positional authority.

Further, the ATs had all learnt a lot, like "sponges", from their experienced colleagues. They felt that their resources and knowledge were utilised and encouraged, and gave examples like being in charge of gymnastics outside with one year olds, symbolic language and autism, creativity and art, teaching children with special needs in playgroups, outdoor activity and environmental education. They had also been encouraged lately to attend courses. Their rhetoric mirrored activities connected to a professional learning community and in fact their descriptions could in a way mirror distributed or teacher leadership. When the ATs,

on the other hand, were asked if they were debating and discussing their work within the preschools, as is expected in a professional learning community, they said there was no time for such discussions; some mentioned staff meetings within groups, but only one of them argued that they were discussing and reflecting a lot, at least in her group, evaluating and changing their methods. The leadership rhetoric or discourse did not seem to be prevalent.

Views of PHTs and APHTs

The *preschool head teachers* and *assistant head teachers* agreed that the GLs needed to be encouraged and supported in their formal leadership role and saw them as leaders, organisers, distributing projects and tasks, and that their management role had gradually expanded. They were very pleased that the group leaders were now attending a similar leadership course as they did themselves last year. One said that she wanted the GLs "to become the third wheel under the wagon" and thus part of the leadership team, along with the PHTs and APHTs, and added her wish "that they see the landscape as we do". A head teacher, working with many preschool teachers, thought that the preschool teachers pushed the group leaders forward, avoiding the responsibility themselves, and the 'monkey' was thrown onto the group leader's shoulder and then to the head teacher. In their discussion it became apparent that their leadership policy was mainly traditional (Jónsdóttir, 2009; Siraj-Blatchford and Manni, 2005) with emphasis on the formal hierarchy and they thought it necessary to strengthen the positional leadership of group leaders and thus expand the formal leadership group.

As the leadership hierarchy affects the role of both group leaders and preschool teachers the division of labour between the head teacher and the assistant head teachers does too. According to the focus group discussion the APHTs were earlier stuck within the groups (classes), and identified themselves within that community but now in two of the preschools the APHTs were out of groups, taking care of the homepage and some administrative tasks, communicating with parents, children and staff. These assistant head teachers placed themselves at the side of the head teachers as "pulling the wagon with them", and were visible members of the top leaders' team. A head teacher said about her assistant head teacher's position:

> She is becoming more visible everywhere, my ears, can tell me and advise me where there is a tension or stress and where we should change something ... she is much more into leadership now, I see her now as a leader.

On the other hand the third head teacher took care of all administrative matters herself and said it was hard for her to delegate and her assistant head teachers

were still placed within one of the groups, and they both liked it that way. They saw the leadership proportion of the APHTs' position grow rather than diminish, because they liked to distribute the responsibility between those two top leaders. Dana and Yendol-Hoppey (2005) argue that attention must be given not only to the leadership of directors and administrators, but also to those who work most closely with children, that is the preschool teacher. For, to date, many early childhood teachers "are ill-prepared to be change agents and advocates for their programs ... [n]or are these roles generally expected of them" (Rust, 1993, p. 106, in Dana and Yendol-Hoppey, 2005).

Views of professionals at the preschool office

The directors and consultants were content too about the fact that GLs were attending leadership course just as other leaders in the preschools did last year. They thought that group leaders in general had grown in their leadership position although they felt that the GLs sometimes were insecure and lacked self-confidence, e.g. when they always needed computers in their preparation time. One of them said:

> They think they always have to show that they did something visible in the preparation time, not that they have been reading and they have some new knowledge or approach or something that they can distribute over time ... and by using the computer you are producing something to print out and you can show it in the group or put it on the website.

Another one had heard group leaders apologise to assistant teachers because of group leaders' meetings they had to attend in their working hours. She was surprised because of the attitude of the GLs and thought they were downgrading their leadership authority and position. The focus group discussed it further and agreed that the situation had been like this for a long time and they thought that the group leaders and leaders of special educational needs within the preschools were not assertive enough in their positions, always defending themselves, and they should report from the meetings so the staff understood the meaning of them. They agreed that probably the assistant teachers spent, on the whole, the most time with the children in the groups: "The more education, the less time with the children". This discussion called for another perspective: that no matter what, the work with the children was the most important work of all:

> You think it is more distinguished to participate in a meeting where there is some sharing rather than work directly with the child. We have to fight against this attitude and solve these problems ... and prevent that the most competent person always leaves the group.

One consultant argued that they should get rid of the group leaders' position; the leadership should be more distributed and every preschool teacher should have similar leadership responsibility as project leaders. The others did not agree with her; they felt there was always someone who had to be in charge and the group leaders were those who distributed the responsibility between people.

Views of parents and politicians

The *parents* did not express strong opinions about the leading emphasis of the group leaders especially, except one participant who would have liked to see more difference between the group leader and other staff members in the group.

The *politicians* did not talk especially about the GLs role but one of them argued that the leadership course for every leader in the preschools was very important and supposed to make for example the head teachers more responsible for the professional and financial tasks, by prioritising and having some freedom within the budget. Further, the course was supposed to strengthen solidarity within the municipality and everybody was very content with the results of the course.

Summary

Although the preschool teachers in general saw themselves as experts in their educational role with the children, they did not express themselves as powerful leaders within the preschools, and this applied to the group leaders and the preschool teachers. The ATs interviewed in this research did not express any annoyance in relation to the group leaders' work and neither did the group leaders feel like 'piggies in the middle' (Jónsdóttir, 2009). In fact the ATs rhetoric could be connected to distributed or teacher leadership. When the four dimensions of teacher leadership (Muijs and Harris, 2003) are viewed, or *the brokering role*, *participative leadership*, *the mediating role* and *forging close relationships,* the preschool teachers touch upon the last three, but the aspect of mutual learning and co-construction of knowledge is missing in their rhetoric, as underlined in the leadership connected to democratic professionalism (Langford, 2010; Moss, 2008) where the preschool teacher is seen as researching, reflective, democratic and a leading professional, using documentation, dialogue, critical reflection and deconstruction (Dahlberg *et al.*, 2007).

The findings revealed that those who are working with the children seem to emphasise different leadership methods than those higher in hierarchy, such as the PHTs, APHTs and professionals within the preschool office and politicians. The former group underline the more collaborative culture while the latter group emphasised positional authority and the formal hierarchy. It was also noticeable that

every participant mentioned the value of the leadership course for group leaders, except the ones it was aimed at. It seems to be a matter of priority to discuss and reconstruct the leadership roles of preschool teachers.

In short it can be said that the preschool teachers do not see themselves as leaders; neither are they seen as such by some of the stakeholders.

4.2 Contextual factors affecting role and leadership of preschool teachers

The factors that the preschool teachers perceived as affecting their professional role and sense of professionalism can be defined as contextual as they are mainly related to educational policy, or the 'professional mandate' (Whitty, 2008) of governments and decisions of municipalities. The foremost factor the preschool teachers perceived in this way was the high number of children within the groups. In the most recent regulation, all minimum requirements on the adult-child ratios and the minimum space for children are gone and authority is now in the hands of the preschool head teacher and municipalities. These stipulations are apparently affected by neo-liberal influences of deregulation (Dýrfjörð, 2011).

The preschool teachers, and other stakeholders, also mentioned the longer days for children in preschools and some of them talked about the preschool as being a service to parents. The data gathering in this research took place in November and December 2009 or in between what has been described as the 'greediness urge' (Óskarsdóttir, 2009) and the politicians' real cut backs of finance to the preschools. The data is influenced by both periods. The long working day of Icelandic parents is not new and was in place during the 'greediness urge'.

Surprisingly, the preschool teachers did not mention the Act on education (no. 87/2008) and the five years M.Ed. programme as a positive and strengthening factor, and neither did professionals in other positions, parents or politicians. The only group mentioning the importance of education was the assistant teachers' group as they gave examples of people's negative discourse about the length of the preschool teachers' education, revealing a lack of respect towards the preschool education and the people working there.

The following sections (4.2.1 and 4.2.2) are related to the second research question: *What contextual factors are currently perceived by preschool teachers to be affecting their professional role and leadership?*

4.2.1 Too many children in the groups

Views of PTs

The focus group of *preschool teachers* were in agreement that there were far too many children in the groups of the preschools, which is up to twenty eight in the group for the oldest ones. This factor affected their professional role enormously but they had survived because of the stability of staff and because many preschool teachers were working in their preschools. It was thus difficult to work as they wanted. They stated that the programme had to be well organised and that the days were noisy, heavy and stressful for children and staff. One participant said it was a "basic human right for children" to stay in a smaller group. In some preschools big groups had been divided into two and the work and teaching became much easier in that way:

> In smaller groups there are fewer conflicts and more unity ... I don't know at what number of children it happens but suddenly it is no longer a unit but turns into many subgroups.

Further, they liked to see the old architecture, smaller buildings and units, but the policy came from above and they felt they were not consulted. Some of them thought it was necessary to review the adult-child ratios but one of them did not see that as a problem. The preschool teachers' wish can be resembled to the concept of the 'Golden Age' (McCulloch, 2001) as everything was better in the old days when they felt they were in control themselves and autonomous (Einarsdóttir, 2003; Jónsdóttir, 2005c) and the prevailing situation made them feel powerless. Further, their perceptions and feelings can be related to the ideology, emphasis and methods of the social pedagogy approach as group sizes and adult-child ratios have been relatively small compared to other more 'school-like' approaches (Bennett, 2005).

Views of ATs, PHTs, APHTs and parent

The *assistant teachers*, *preschool head teachers*, *assistant preschool head teachers* and *parents* agreed with the preschool teachers that there were far too many children in a group and it must be stressful for them because of all the noise and they were likely to be exhausted when they got home at last. The ATs also thought it was impossible to care for each individual in those circumstances. One said that they emphasised a cuddle for the younger ones when they arrived in the morning and reminded one another to remember the quiet children. Another one said that one staff member in her group had a list in her closet where she labelled the ones she had spoken to during the day:

> You know, you lose your grip; the children are so many, a lot is happening, all kinds of organised work ... and suddenly, Jón, I have not seen you the whole day!

According to the ATs the children were often interrupted in their play because of the organised work and tight structure and had to gather things together quickly but it would be ideal if they could develop their play during the week in more continuity, as had been done in one of the preschools:

> It is like this: schedule, schedule, schedule, gather everything together, gather everything together … go there, do this, and always go to the toilet … always follow the schedule, you have five minutes, hurry, hurry … have you noticed how often we say hurry each day, well kids, now we have to hurry, how often do you think they have to hear that ... group work, hurry (take on your clothes, we are in a hurry, another participant added).

Preschool head teachers and *assistant head teachers* emphasised that the space for each child was just half of what it had been in the old day-care institutions, and as then many children were staying eight or nine hours. They perceived that the children were tired of interactions with so many individuals and there were conflicts and blows:

> You know, we are damaging individuals; we are damaging the mental health of those individuals.

They were very disappointed that there were no criteria in the new law and regulation about the square meters and the number of children, the municipalities were meant to make the decision now and the union had blessed it - as one of them said:

> I don't know how our union could fall on its head like that. I tried to protest in a meeting two years ago, but I felt like a Taliban.

The ATs', PHTs and APHTs views seemed to underline the developmental psychology perspective focusing on the individual child (Johansen, 2009) accompanied with the ideology of the here-and-now perspective, where positive affective feelings and active interest in the child are instrumental in establishing intimate human bonds and in promoting secure attachment between parents and children (Kristjánsson, 2006), or the 'child in need' (Moss *et al.*, 2000). The Nordic child-centeredness and the ideology of the good childhood could also be observed.

The *parents* also thought that there should be fewer children in the groups and they needed more space, but it also depended on the organisation of the accommodation, if there were large rooms or small rooms, and how the staff could divide the group. Halls had been used for children in recent years instead of building new preschools and as one of the parents said: "How can I complain, it was then my boy was enrolled here" (they laugh). The parents did not express any worries

connected to the children's psychological health, individual needs or learning opportunities.

Views of professionals at the preschool office

The *directors and consultants* did not quite agree on whether the number of children was too high in the groups and thought it was also a question of the schedule and the structure within the groups. Some of them agreed with the *assistant teachers* about the tight schedule and asked about free-flow play and did not quite understand the time pressure and work load the preschool teachers were talking about:

> ... while we [preschool teachers in general] were still insecure ... we organised certain hours ... to make it easier for us. You can see we are working with music, it is on Tuesday and Thursday, we are going to the gymnastic hall twice a week, we are doing it all, you can see it in the schedule ... We are still doing it and I dislike it very much ... the free play is maybe organised between 11:00 and 11:30 and then you ask what happened to the real preschool activity ... and when I have been in the preschools discussing e.g. what is going on in the clothing room they say they can't take care of it all because they are so pressed for time and I say: "Pressed because by what? By what?

Another professional considered that preschool teachers did not dare to use play as a learning method. Good organisation could be seen in how the space was used and to include the group: "It is not necessary to lower the number of children in the groups, rather diminish the subgroups and make those in charge more responsible ... to create a space within the space".

Again the message from the professionals at the preschool office was a bit mixed or ambiguous. On one hand the preschool teachers were seen as more secure in their educational role than before, as noted earlier, but on the other hand they were still stuck in old timetables and structures. As Einarsdóttir's (2003) findings revealed the preschool teachers perceived insecurity about the caring or the teaching aspect of their role and they seemed to deal with the educational demands by making the daily schedule tighter like in the primary school, thus fulfilling curriculum emphasis on subject or learning areas. Gradually they also had to increase the number of children in the groups and it is possible that these changes in the adult-child ratios and less space for each child, accompanied with lack of preschool teachers and high turnover rate of staff before the recession, had affected how they organised the days.

Those who were connected to the special needs teaching at the preschool office did not altogether agree with the pedagogical consultants:

> If there were 15 children in the group I would manage to work without tight structure and schedule but because they are 25-30 I would not manage without it

> ... it is also difficult to work with all those people, they are not all equally capable of finding out what to do with the children ... the children can't endure playing forever when there are conflicts and (Insertion: They can if the play is allowed to develop) ... 30 together in the room (Insertion: They are never 30 together).

Further they were worried about the development of the children that needed special needs teaching and how they would learn to communicate and interact with others and thought that children were over stimulated visually and did not listen anymore in those crowded noisy groups:

> They are participating in circle times and maybe 20% are listening to a story, the others are not … day after day it is on the schedule … and they learn **not** to listen … and if you are going to survive in a group of 29 children and 6 grown-ups in different locals where everybody is loud and noisy you have to close your inner ear … we are stimulating them enormously in visual ways by computers, television, play, photos but the skill to listen is decreasing … I wish that I could look back in the end of my career and say that I had done something to stop this development.

As Jensen (2009) argues, emphasis on participation, democracy, autonomy, freedom, and acting as agents in their own learning process, or the emphasis on the good childhood, requires a lot from children and could be difficult for those who are socially disadvantaged. In the end the participants in the focus group agreed that a good and flexible structure was for the better where everybody knew their role but one of them reiterated that "organising of the settings is the weakest part of the Icelandic preschool teachers' role".

Views of politicians

The politicians did not mention the number of children in the preschools but when asked especially about it they said they were very positive about the issue but the municipality were still building one preschool each year to meet the needs of parents. They had asked the specialists in the preschool office to find out how much the reduction of places would become if the space for each child were estimated in certain square meters. They believed that probably they would have to cut down 90 spaces, equivalent to one preschool:

> We want to be very positive about the professional side but simultaneously we want to be positive about our service to parents and families ... we are starting the discussion and the plan ... can work in four years which is a minimum time to depreciate one preschool and maybe we can do it step by step.

One of the politicians mentioned that the noise was often intolerable in the preschools and admired both children and staff:

> I have emphasised ... that when preschools are designed, acoustics and noise control must be taken care of ... like I say; for small children staying in such a noisy environment for ten hours, and staff, you can't offer people such circumstances … it has to be in order.

The politicians talked openly about the conflict between the educational and the economic function and aimed to keep some balance between them but it is a critical question to ask about what side will win during the recession period.

Summary

Clearly there existed a conflict between the educational and the economic function of preschool and the municipality had decided to enrol more children into the preschools, which was not in accordance with the professionals' and practitioners' educational ideology. However, they seemed to react by structuring the work more, and simultaneously responding to demands related to changed curriculum, new job title and suitable work in the first school level. Further, there had been a huge turnover of staff, and although these three preschools under investigation had a high percentage of preschool teachers, it certainly was not a reality within all the preschools in the municipality.

As sometimes before, the professionals at the preschool office were somewhat ambivalent about the subject, as they were situated between decisive preschool head teachers and politicians who the PHTs considered only thought about the service to parents, or the voters.

4.2.2 The preschool as service to parents

Views of PTs

Some participants in the *GLs* and *PTs* focus group were preoccupied about the role of preschools as a service to parents and mentioned the hours of the preschools in that connection. They tended to feel that it was far too long a time for a one year old child to stay in preschool for eight or nine hours each day and four to six hours was enough. Johansen's (2009) findings revealed that Norwegian preschool teachers were sceptical towards full time day care of children. Most of them thought that children between one and three years old should not stay longer than six hours in the preschools, but older children could stay longer. The Norwegian preschool teachers argued that if the children stayed such a long time they would become exhausted (n. *sliten*), especially the youngest ones.

One participant felt that the concept 'service' was negative and did not express the proper meaning:

> We attend our work and hopefully we look forward to it and the preschool should also be an exciting place for the children, the parents attend their work and the children are in appropriate circumstances. This is of course an idealistic notion that everybody is going to an entertaining place where they feel good and have suitable activities and new demands, sense some success and meet each other.

They also mentioned that the parents could pay more for the later hours (after 16.00 p.m.) and that possibly it would be the politicians' way to cut down expenses but others were sceptical about it. Politicians were mainly thinking of "service to everyone, service to everyone". They were hoping that some effects of the recession would be that main concerns in the society would change, parents' working hours would become fewer each day and thus children would not stay as long in preschools. They wished that the working week would become thirty five hours and then parents and children could spend more time together.

However, the preschool teachers were not as enthusiastic about the working hours of parents as the PHTs and APHTs, and they did not moralise about the parents' situations or blame them for being bad parents, as Johansen's (2009) findings revealed.

Views of ATs

The *assistant teachers* did not understand why the parents did not sometimes fetch their child earlier and spend time with them at home. Thus they were a bit more moralistic about the parents' behaviour than the preschool teachers. In a new survey (the MAFAL study) on attitudes of preschool teachers and assistants in Norwegian preschools (Løvgren and Gulbrandsen, 2012) the findings confirmed that the employees were apparently more sceptical of the present supply of day care than the parents were as users of their services. According to Løvgren and Gulbrandsen (2012) the employees' opinion may be based on their personal interests and feelings as parents and citizens but the huge increase in enrolment of very small children within day care centres also concerns them strongly by changing their working conditions.

Although, one assistant teacher told an opposite story about the parents of the younger children and said that they were cooperative when they were asked to fetch their children before 16.00 p.m. each day. The same one was worried because of the financial effects of the recession on families and said:

> I hope that the children can keep on staying in preschools ... for themselves ...
> sometimes the stress is so much that it is much better for some of them to be in
> the preschool than staying at home.

This argument is one of a few addressing the different social background of children as it affects their life situation.

The views of PHTs and APHTs

In the group of *head teachers and assistant head teachers* the participants had strong opinions about the issue and questioned the arrangement that children were

staying up to nine or nine and half hours in large, crowded groups. They observed that parents seemed to be under pressure in their work and all flexibility seemed to have disappeared and there was no emphasis on family values anymore in connection to the working role. They questioned also if there should be full service for everyone and one asked: "Is this a proper life, to have all children the whole day through in preschools?" They were wondering why the parents did not fetch their children earlier when they were staying at home themselves, when on parental leave, were unemployed or with a younger child at home and one of them said: "The preschool child must feel rejected". They saw it as a solution that these children could stay a shorter time as in other Nordic countries, for example from 9:00 to 15:00 p.m., and then the afternoons would be more relaxing, as they had been some years ago.

They were very worried about the welfare and happiness of children and one thought that they had neglected children's rights during the so-called prosperity period (the greediness urge). Now it was time to focus on them again because the children had the right to stay more with their parents so that they raised the children and the preschool should be simply a good addition. In Gullöv's (2006) findings the number of hours the children spent in the preschool became somehow a symbolic expression of if the parents were 'good' or 'bad'. In the Icelandic PHTs and APHTs focus group this 'blaming the parents' view was present, but at the same time the participants seemed honest in their stance about the children rights, well-being and happiness, but they were also conceptualising the child as 'child in need' rather than the 'rich child' (Moss *et al.*, 2000).

The participants in the group argued that children came younger into the preschools and they had to educate the younger parents about what was best for them, and get parents on board in fighting against the long days and the high number of children. There they talked according to the ideology of the traditional professionalism (Etzioni, 1964) which can be related to Urban's (2008) technical habitus rather than the practice of democratic professionalism. The preschool head teachers had written letters to the preschool committee and hoped for some changes as had happened in some municipalities where the parents had to pay extra for the ninth hour. One head teacher tried to see into the future:

> In about 5, 10, or 15 years ... the history is going to judge us: Why did you allow the children to stay such a long time?

The *PHTs*, *AHTs* and *ATs* expressed their approval of the book *The years no one remembers*, by the psychologist Sæunn Kjartansdóttir, where the emphasis is

on the attachment of parents and child in the first years of life. Some of them had told the parents about the book and they knew that some preschool teachers had quoted the book when interviewing parents. One head teacher said she always informed the parents in their first meeting that the preschool was characterised by upbringing in a group but not by individual upbringing, although the staff did its very best. Johansen (2009) interprets this view as a developmental psychology perspective focusing on the individual child. It can be understood in connection with attachment theories, concerning children and parents, but also connected to ideas of the *good childhood* where the image of the home is characterised with tranquillity and peace, or a *heaven in a heartless world* (Gullestad, 2002; Midjo, 1994).

The *preschool head teachers* especially were discontented because the politicians did not use their knowledge about children's upbringing and well-being but rather listened to other experts. Although first and foremost the politicians listened to the voters (parents) and tried to fulfil their needs for more service. They argued that the municipality's governance favoured hierarchical management and their boss sometimes used control towards the field, giving them orders, and there seemed to be lack of understanding by the preschool office and politicians about the huge work of managing and leading a preschool, and they felt there was a lack of respect and trust. A preschool head teacher said:

> We are the specialists in the field, we have the most knowledge of what goes on in the preschools and we are truly an unused resource ... but there are others making the rules who are far away ... they see us as the maids of the system.

The views the PHTs and APHTs perceived that those 'above' them had towards their work are stereotypically gendered (Acker, 1999, Coleman, 2002) and they perceived them as downgrading their professional role and expertise. They were not content about the academics either and thought they had not listened to them:

> What does the science say about the fact that one year old child is staying nine hours every day in the preschool, in three square meters!

All the groups above declared their wish that there were different emphases on family matters in the society. A clearer family policy was needed (Eydal, 2006), parental leave should be longer and the parents should be able to work less, especially parents of young children. An assistant teacher said:

> I was so content with the recession; I was hoping that it would bring the children back to their parents ... (laughter)

Professionals at the preschool office and politicians

The *directors* and *consultants* agreed with the other groups about the days being too long for children in preschools but this was the reality and they were sure that

they could make it more satisfactory for the children, thus acknowledging the multiple functions of preschools. The director of special needs teaching put it like this:

> In a perfect world I would cut down the number of children in the groups, I would place enthusiastic, mindful, well-paid preschool teachers, motivated by passion, in every positions … the children would stay 6-7 hours … it would be the educational institution we are talking about and in a world like this the parents of young children would work 75% … but OK, this is the reality, children are staying up to 9 hours and maybe we cannot change that but can we change those 9 hours for the child?

The *politicians* were in a dilemma about the matter. They agreed that the day in preschool was very long for the children but on the other hand it was a service that the political parties had committed themselves to offer. One of them admitted that in the beginning of his political career he listened first and foremost to the parents because they were a bigger group as voters, than were the preschool teachers, but later he had been listening to the professionals too and he could see many sides of the matter now:

> The main emphasis is the same and parents realise that their children should stay a shorter time in the preschool, but maybe not [my child]...

The committee was preparing to limit the day to eight hours for each child instead of nine, and they also planned to save money by trimming down positions of staff, and if parents were in trouble they could buy extra time. As a result the preschool staff would become more content and it was believed that the majority of parents would understand the operation. The other politician argued that although the parents should be the children's spokesmen, they were often assessing how the operations suited their working day. The politician pitied the children because of their long day in preschools, away from their nearest and dearest. The preschool head teachers had fought hard for this decision, but the parents were against it and probably everything would become 'crazy' in the community if that decision would be made.

Summary

All stakeholders connected to the preschool field were concerned about the long day for children in preschools but their arguments were based on different perspectives. The ideology of the professionals within the preschools seems to differ up to a point but first and foremost, as in the former section, the issue can be seen as conflict between the educational and economic function, where the PHTs were the most active group in fighting for shorter days for preschool children. It can be argued that, especially the head teachers' view can be connected to a

developmental perspective focusing on the individual child. However all the professionals, at least within the preschools, seemed to connect it also to Nordic child-centeredness, the ideology of the good childhood and children's rights, and they really wished for a better life for the children. Júlíusdóttir (2001) talks about 'cultural mismatch' when the material development of the society is somehow faster than the development of individual' and families' values, customs and views of life. Another mismatch can be noticed between the life situations of families in Iceland and the values, customs and view of professionals and practitioners within preschools. The reality, which is long working hours for parents and stress and conflicts between family and work (Stefánsson, 2008) does not seem to match with their definition of the first school level in the educational system and they use all methods they think are useful to fight against it. In their professional mind, preschool education should be an addition to a good family life but not the life itself.

In addition the preschool teachers, but especially the preschool head teachers, sense that their knowledge and expertise is not valued by those who are 'above' them and those attitudes are certainly affecting the PTs professional identity, as will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

4.3 Professional identities of preschool teachers

In the following subsections the focus is on the third research question: *How do the preschool teachers see their professional identity and how do stakeholders' current perceptions of their role and leadership, and relevant contextual factors, appear to affect their professional identity?* Sections 4.3.1 to 4.3.3 are about the stakeholders' views and perceptions. There, the focus is on how the role of PTs versus roles of other professionals and practitioners, and the leadership role, is seen by the stakeholders, and how gendered attitudes are connected to their views and perceptions. In section 4.3.4 how the preschool teachers seem to see their identity is discussed, and if and how the stakeholders' perceptions and views appear to affect it. In the discussion I will refer back to former sections in the findings, thus connecting understanding of roles, leadership and identities.

4.3.1 How do stakeholders see the role of PTs versus roles of ATs and other professionals?

It seems rather noticeable from the findings that the rhetoric of some of the stakeholders did not underline the expertise of the preschool teachers in the educational work with children. Some of them also thought that it depended primarily on the personality or the character of the practitioner how her or his

relationship or interaction was with the children. These are similar stories as Olsen (2011) describes in his article on division of labour between pedagogues (preschool teachers) and assistants in Denmark.

The parents' views were mixed, as some saw the PTs as those taking care of the planning and 'formal' teaching and thus it did not matter who was "sitting with the child when cutting with scissors or watching the children play", and "assistant teachers were necessary because they brought in different perspectives", and "the education of the staff was not a big deal" for another one. This view that education of the workforce did not matter can be connected to the gendered image of the worker as *substitute mother* (Moss, 2006).Only one parent underlined the necessity that all practitioners should be educated.

The politicians did not underline the expertise of the preschool teachers within the preschools and did not encourage any action to multiply their number. On the other hand the politicians liked to see other groups of people in the preschools, such as other professionals, assistant teachers, 'ordinary people', 'experienced mothers' and 'grandmothers' as the preschools could never be occupied only by preschool teachers and hiring all kind of people and professionals could become a strength, not a weakness. Nørregård-Nielsen's (2006) findings revealed that because of more educational demands from parents and politicians the Danish preschool teachers were eager to strengthen their professionalism and professional role but at the same time there was not much talk about the necessity of increasing the number of preschool teachers and the sense of collegiality within the preschools made it complicated for them to show their expertise. Thus, the preschool teachers thought it was difficult to gain professional status in society.

As the assistant teachers argued, the position of preschool teachers and them, as the lowest groups of the hierarchy, is almost equal and they seem to get similar reactions from other stakeholders. As Olsen's (2011) research findings within Danish preschools reveal, there was no evident "hierarchical" division of labour among assistants and pedagogues (preschool teachers) within the preschool groups (classes), and on that basis assistants could not be regarded as 'assistants'. Olsen (2011) asks why the pedagogues do not make their education and expertise more visible. One reason he mentions that possibly holds them back are certain routines, time constraints and collective arrangements when working with the children to ensure that the daily practice flows easily. If the staff is supposed to survive each day they have to have the competence to keep order in the chaos and, as I understand Olsen (2011), to switch easily between roles and activities. Similarly, Kuisma and Sandberg's (2008) findings revealed that both preschool

teachers and assistants often benefit from an inclusion theory, as they carry out the same activities. The researchers argue that preschools are built on democracy, and therefore everybody is considered to have equal *value* (my emphasis) in the working team, although having qualitatively different education or experience. That can also explain the stance of the Danish pedagogues that if they ask the assistants to sweep the floor they are labelling them as 'second class people' (Nørregård-Nielsen, 2006).

Finally, the message from the professionals at the preschool office regarding the preschool teachers' expertise seemed mixed. Although they expressed their wish that there was a preschool teacher in every position, they did not really mind who read a story for the children or swept the floor if the task was based on the group leaders' decision and benefitted the children. They perceived that the preschool teachers downgraded their own expertise by putting the ATs in charge e.g. of circle times, as it needs competence and practice to do it. Further, they felt that because of the preschool teachers' inferiority complex they were enthusiastic to hire other professionals into the preschools. On the one hand their discussion reveals that the preschool teachers are not valuing their own knowledge and expertise in an environment numerically dominated by laypersons (Steinnes, 2007). It seems silently acknowledged and perceived that assistant teachers are capable of performing the preschool teachers' educational role with the children if they are supervised and it is generally not seen as threatening to the preschool teachers' professional role. On the other hand other professionals are seen as 'outsiders' aiming at taking over the professional roles. Generally, it should be seen as an advantage to have more professionals within the settings as there are not enough preschool teachers.

It can be argued that the stakeholders' views encouraged a 'laypersons' oriented identity' of preschool teachers.

4.3.2 Stakeholders' perceptions of the leadership role of preschool teachers

As can be seen from the findings and the former subsection, an emphasis on the leading role of preschool teachers overall was not apparent by the stakeholders. Rather, the emphasis was on one leader at the top as responsible for development and success but not on 'teachers as leaders' or distributed leadership. The latter view is more in accordance with viewing preschool teachers in general as leading professionals within the field, as confirmed in the curriculum framework (Mennta- og menningarmálaráðuneytið, 2011).

As my former research findings reveal, those who are working with the children seem to emphasise different leadership methods than those higher in the hierarchy and that counts for group leaders, preschool teachers and assistant teachers. As the preschool teachers and assistant teachers described the leadership within the groups it was much more participative and collaborative than hierarchical, and thus more in the spirit of teacher leadership and distributed leadership.

The preschool and assistant preschool head teachers, and professionals within the preschool office, connected leadership primarily to positional authority. They saw the group leader as a leading professional within the groups, and thought they needed support and encouragement to become "the third wheel under the wagon " and "see the world as we do". The ideology of distributed leadership was discussed by one consultant while the other stakeholders mentioned seemed to accept the prevailing situation uncritically. The same consultant wanted more professional discussions in the preschools and felt that the preschool teachers should be more active in writing about what they were doing thus making early childhood education still more visible. She wanted more robust agency as Woodrow (2008) discusses when referring to identity where notions of professionalism of preschool teachers are more characterised by leadership.

However, as the other professionals at the preschool office argued, there seemed to have been some kind of professional network in the community in strengthening the educational work within the preschools and making it visible within the municipality and among parents. Such action can in fact be related to Goffin and Washington's (2007) leadership of the whole field of early childhood education, and the tenets of democratic professionalism.

4.3.3 Underlying attitudes to gender connected to the role and leadership of preschool teachers

Underlying attitudes to gender connected to the roles and leadership of the preschool teachers were apparent. For example in the rhetoric of the politicians the preschools should be home-like and all kinds of people, amongst others mothers and grandmothers should work there. Similarly, although the parents did not agree about the role of the preschool teachers, sentences such as: "the education of the staff is not a big deal for me if the individual loves to be with children and likes to see their success and achievement" occurred, and in the end it seemed to all depend on the personality of the person but not their education or expertise. As mentioned in section 4.3.1 this attitude can be connected to the understanding of the practitioner as *substitute mother* (Moss, 2006, 2008) and gendered. As Acker

(1999) argues, there still seem to be gendered prejudices connected to the preschool teachers' work, as people seem to identify it with the domestic rather than the public sphere, thus calling on the 'caring script', that is "...a set of expectations that mimics women's traditional work in the home" (Acker, 1999, p. 277, see also Coleman, 2002). Langford (2010) connects the status of early childhood teachers in society to the focus of child-centred pedagogy, and thus the teacher is placed 'behind the scenes' of an early childhood setting. She quotes Steedman (1985) who locates child-centred pedagogy in Froebel's description of the teacher who is 'the mother made conscious'. Further, Langford (2010, quoting Steedman, 1987) reports that prescribed psychological dimensions of modern good mothering were forged by nurses, nannies and primary school teachers who represent the ideal mother who spends the entire day in one room with children, watching and nurturing them. The barriers for acknowledgement can thus be the similarities with the role of the mother and the functions of the children's homes which can call for resistance to recognising the profession's knowledge and competences (Acker, 1999; Lasky, 2000).

Osgood (2006) argues that an ethic of care (Noddings, 1995) and emotional labour are cornerstones to early childhood practitioners' understanding of themselves, and that these qualities are denigrated in dominant discourses of professionalism. Further, Moyles (2001) argues that feelings and emotions such as *passion* (my emphasis) are acceptable, and indeed desirable, as part of educational thinking and practise. It seems that still very important stakeholders, such as parents and politicians, send stereotypical gendered messages to the preschool teachers, which can be traced to the deep rooted, patriarchal prejudice of society (Coleman, 2002, p. 95).

4.3.4 How do preschool teachers see their professional and leadership identities?

Regarding their *professional identities* the preschool teachers saw themselves as professionals and experts in their *educational* role working with the children and as teachers and caregivers, according to Einarsdóttir's (2006, 2008) third camp.

The factors the preschool teachers mentioned as strengthening their role and professionalism were related to their *educational* role and the *educational* function of preschools (Vandenbroeck *et al.*, 2010). They were especially satisfied when the preschool head teacher was a strong professional leader, although they felt themselves as a part of the professional team, and they constructed their professional identity by participating in important developmental work within the preschool and the municipality, and by adding to their knowledge and expertise

within and outside the preschools. It can be argued that everything supporting the educational role was of importance and strengthened their professional identity.

As has been accounted for, the preschool teachers perceived that their role *towards the parents* had changed enormously in recent years. The preschool teachers argued that their marketing of education had made the educational function of the preschool more visible and the parents more aware of the preschools' importance and educational emphasis. In describing their actions they sounded like activists and agents of change (Sachs, 2001, 2003; Woodrow, 2008) although they did not seem to have activated the parents as participative partners, as emphasised in democratic professionalism. My former research findings reveal that preschool teachers perceive that parents are pleased with the preschools and respect their professionalism. The perception of the PTs in this research was similar and they seemed to choose this attitude while constructing their professional identity and did not let the 'service' issue change how they felt.

The 'negative' contextual factors affecting the preschool teachers' role were connected to the policy of governments and the municipality and the economic function of preschool, including the high number of children within the groups and the preschool as 'service to parents'. As Woods and Jeffrey's study (2002) reveals, teachers may construct multiple identities to meet competing demands and expectations, and this can lead to a sense of unsteadiness and uncertainty (2002, p. 105). The PTs identity connected to their professional, or educational role, and interactions with children, staff and parents, was 'positive', as in the old days when they felt more autonomous and in control of their working life (Einarsdóttir, 2006; Jónsdóttir, 2005). The preschool teachers cling to this professional identity but on the other hand they were forced to change their professional role and leadership, and thus their identity, for the benefit of the economic function. Stronach *et al.* (2002) speak of teacher identities as being 'in flux' (p. 109) as they are negotiated within situations where identity is affected by dilemmas and difficulties that are often outside the control of the individual.

As research findings have revealed, preschool teachers have shown a lack of identity with the concept of leadership. Similarly, the preschool teachers in this research did not talk about themselves as powerful leading professionals within the preschools, and this applied to all preschool teachers including those who were group leaders. Thus they did not seem to have robust leadership identity (Woodrow, 2008). Instead they saw the preschool head teacher as the main educational leader. This perception is in accordance with many other stakeholders' views, but according to the assistant teachers the PTs surely showed leadership within the groups,

although it was not the traditional and hierarchical one. In a way the preschool teachers had more trouble in articulating their leadership role than their educational expertise.

Like other stakeholders the preschool teachers seem to see *the assistant teachers* as an accepted group within preschools and speak highly about their competences, as is in accordance with the discourse or rhetoric of the stakeholders. On the other hand they wonder about the message they are sending to the politicians, by having all kinds of specialists temporarily within the preschools, as they could do those activities themselves. It is worth considering if the preschool teachers should have paid more attention to their status and identity in connection to the status and identity of the assistant teachers through the years. As many research findings show (e.g. Kuisma and Sandberg, 2008; Moyles, 2001; Nørregård-Nielsen, 2006; Olsen, 2011), the preschool teachers' knowledge has been situated 'in the shadow', 'behind the scenes', been 'invisible' or 'marginalised' for various reasons. Simultaneously, Steinnes (2007) findings revealed that preschool teachers had difficulties with verbalising their knowledge and she argues that if they do not perceive the strength in their own competences they may have difficulties with telling others about them. In that respect it seems that the PTs have not managed to inform the parents clearly about what is inherent in their professional role and expertise, thus strengthening the laypersons' oriented view.

The *preschool head teachers* expressed their perception that the view of those 'above' them was gendered (Acker, 1999; Coleman, 2002) and they perceived them as downgrading their professional role and expertise; work related to male employees was enhanced but they were seen as the 'maids of the system'. Although the preschool head teachers brought up the subject, it can be maintained that this discourse within the preschools affects the preschool teachers' identity too because of the closeness in the field and the relational core of the work (Urban, 2008). Although preschool teachers have fulfilled every step of traditional professionalization (Etzioni, 1964) one wonders if it is still a fact that a profession mostly occupied by women is not respected as 'a profession' because women are not men (Witz, 1992).

4.3.5 Summary

As can be seen, the professional identities of Icelandic preschool teachers, or how they see themselves as professionals and leaders, are affected by the prevailing perceptions of the stakeholders. Their perceptions related to the role of

preschools, expertise, gender and leadership play a huge role, as does policy making at national and municipality levels.

In short, the relevant stakeholders hold gendered views which do not stress the expertise and leadership of the preschool teachers as a profession. Further, political decisions about the number of children in groups and the role of the preschool as service to parents, appears to affect the professional identity of the preschool teachers.

The PTs, like the other stakeholders, see assistant teachers as a precious, accepted and familiar group, and do not seem to reflect on how it affects perceptions about their own expertise. Thus, they may even be encouraging the politicians' view of having other professionals and experts in the preschools, taking over their role. Like the stakeholders, the preschool teachers do not see themselves as strong leaders, but focus on the preschool head teacher to fulfil that role. The agency and leadership they expressed was connected to their campaign of marketing or advertising the preschool education for parents and in giving their advice to parents.

Their reaction, as the data reveal, towards the 'professional mandate' or the policy of the government and the municipality is to focus on and construct their identities in relation to the children, staff and parents within the groups and their leaders within the preschools. There they are avoiding and attempting to shut out the negative forces, such as the demands of parents for more service, thus protecting their professional identity. There are echoes here of the gendered image of the teacher who represents the ideal mother and spends the entire day in one room with children, watching and nurturing them (Langford, 2010, quoting Steedman, 1985).

The preschool teachers' identity is thus not shaped primarily by the teachers themselves (Sachs, 2001, 2003; Woodrow, 2008) although they certainly defend a part of it.

5. Conclusions

As declared in the introduction, *the professional roles, leadership and identities* of preschool teachers in Iceland have been at the heart of this thesis. When I started this journey I had certain aims in my mind, based on my 'lived experience' and knowledge gained through my studies. The motivation for choosing these issues was, to begin with, my professional experience in both informal and formal positions within and related to the preschool teachers' profession where I have addressed these elements daily. Further I was motivated by my own research findings (Jónsdóttir, 2008, 2009) from my Institution Focused Study within the EdD International Programme, which revealed that the knowledge of preschool teachers lowest in the hierarchy was not fully utilised in the decision-making process. Finally, there is a gender dimension to the study as preschool teachers, as a female profession, are simply less likely to be seen as professional because of their gender and seem to have to fight for their acknowledgement as a professional workforce. Giving the profession a voice is of great importance to me. The purpose of the research is thus both educational and political. Built on the purpose, the research questions were as follows:

- How are the professional role and leadership of preschool teachers currently perceived by them and by other stakeholders in preschool education in Iceland?
- What contextual factors are currently perceived by preschool teachers to be affecting their professional role and leadership?
- How do the preschool teachers see their professional identity and how do stakeholders' current perceptions of their role and leadership, and relevant contextual factors, appear to affect their professional identity?

The findings of the research can be seen both as 'familiar' and 'unfamiliar' and in the following discussion my aim is to shed light especially on issues which can be considered as new contributions related to the preschool teachers' roles, leadership and identities. There, findings and literature of the emergent analytic framework will be quoted when relevant. Finally, I discuss some implications for the preschool field, look critically at the research process and recommend further research.

5.1 Preschool teachers' professional role and leadership

The first thing that was apparent when analysing the findings was the influence of the functions of early childhood education, or preschools, as defined by

Vandenbroeck *et al.* (2010) and how much tension existed between those functions, especially the *educational* and the *economic*, which the professionals within the preschools labelled as "service to parents". The preschool teachers underlined their educational role so that everything strengthening that role was seen as positive and added to their expertise and sense of professionalism.

The ideology of the preschool teachers' professional role and the functions of preschool

The ideology of the preschool teachers' role can be related to Einarsdóttir's (2006, 2008) third camp, thus integrating care giving and teaching, favouring particularly the social pedagogy approach, the good childhood and Nordic child-centeredness. Additionally the preschool teachers beliefs touched upon the socio-cultural approach, the 'rich child' and the teacher as a researcher (Moss *et al.*, 2000, 2006).The preschool teachers seemed to be secure in their educational role, thus not mirroring the insecurity found by Einarsdóttir (2003).

As Bennett (2005) argues, group sizes and child/staff ratios have been relatively smaller in the social pedagogy tradition than the more school-like tradition. The preschool teachers thus saw the number of children within groups, and the policy of governments and municipalities, as a 'negative' contextual factor, accompanied by long days in preschool for children. This situation affected their educational and leadership role greatly, as they needed to structure the day more and tighten the schedule, and it affected also their sense of autonomy (see Moriarty, 2000). The preschool teachers wished for the calmer days and the smaller units of their "Golden Age" (McCulloch, 2001), and felt a bit powerless towards the politicians and those above them in the central administration. The consequences can be described as de-professionalization (e.g. McCulloch, 2001; Hargreaves, 2000) although it is not connected to the content of curriculum frameworks, surveillance and control, as in England.

Eydal (2006) argues that Icelandic circumstances demand a special Icelandic family policy and the consequences of the economic collapse and the recession adds to that need. The preschool teachers, like other professionals and practitioners within the preschools, wished that the children could spend more time with their parents at home but strangely they did not talk much about how the preschool could be a shelter for the children in turbulent times. The discussion of the function of social justice was almost missing, as was the ethical stance towards their role (Oberhuemer, 2005). The exception was for those who were responsible for special needs teaching. Otherwise, the 'average' child was in focus, and it is possible that

the social justice dimension became 'invisible' through the amalgamation of day care centres and playschools into preschools, as the children who were staying whole days in day care centres often came from more vulnerable families (see Bennett, 2003, about division of Kindergartens and day care in section 1.2.1).

Perceptions of the professional role of preschool teachers

The preschool teachers did not talk much about their collaboration with the assistant teachers but mentioned that the experienced ones were "as precious as the preschool teachers" on the job. As the percentage of PTs in the preschool chosen for the research was higher than the average in the country, the culture of the preschools, and the assumptions, values, norms and discourses characterizing it, was probably shaped by them and the preschool head teachers and assistant preschool head teachers. Thus the findings showed no similarity to my former findings of conflicts between assistants and preschool teachers, the preschool teachers did not express any annoyance about their position; everything seemed to 'flow effortlessly' and the assistant teachers confirmed that.

Further, the ATs rhetoric revealed that there was not a hierarchical division of labour between assistants and preschool teachers (Olsen, 2011), apart from the fact that the PTs had interviews with the parents and were allowed preparation time. The preschool head teachers and assistant preschool head teachers underlined the authority of the group leaders amongst the PTs as did the focus group of professionals at the preschool office. It can be argued that they talked about the preschool teachers and assistant teachers lowest in hierarchy as one joint group, which does not encourage the perception of preschool teachers as leading and visible professionals in the preschools (Ministry of Education, Science and culture, 2011; Langford, 2010) and in the field (Goffin and Washington, 2007).

On the other hand some of the preschool teachers were worried about the messages they were sending the politicians when they hired professionals temporarily to 'teach' subjects they could easily provide themselves. They saw this as being against the ideology of integrating learning within the daily 'flow' and it also acted to downgrade their education and expertise. The answer of the politicians was that they could see many people working in and contributing to the preschools, including 'mothers' and 'grandmothers' and 'other professionals' along with the preschool teachers. The professionals at the preschool office thought that the PTs tended to be too eager to hire other specialists in the preschools because of their 'inferiority complex' and considered that the PTs were downgrading their expertise

themselves. Somehow, there seemed to be a gap between how the PTs saw themselves, as experts and professionals, and how other stakeholders saw them.

Is there a gap between preschool teachers and parents' views?

The preschool teachers felt that there was coherence between how they performed their role and the demands of the parents. The fact that they had advertised the importance of the preschool education to the parents, allowed a positive feedback loop to develop. This is in accordance with findings of my former research (Jónsdóttir, 2005). Overall the parents seem content with the preschools (Björgvinsson *et al.*, 2009; Einarsdóttir, 2008, 2010).

In the parents' focus group lively discussion occurred about the preschools' role, gender issues and participation of parents in the practice and activities. These parents in many ways seemed to be prepared to see the preschool as a community and a forum (Dahlberg *et al.*, 2007) as propounded in democratic professionalism. The parents seemed thus prepared to expand the role of the preschools and discuss issues such as gender that the preschool teachers did not mention at all.

Leadership of preschool teachers – collaborative rather than hierarchical

The findings of the leadership dimension of the preschool teachers' role were both familiar and unfamiliar. The familiar aspect was that the preschool teachers, group leaders included, tended to express themselves as carers and teachers of children rather than potential leaders of adults, thus showing lack of identification with the concept of 'leadership'. Another familiar thing was that those higher in hierarchy underlined the leading role of the group leaders and a more hierarchical authority structure while those working in close relationship with the children, staff and parents talked more about horizontal and collaborative leadership. The unfamiliar aspect of the findings is that in the rhetoric of the assistant teachers, rather than the preschool teachers they touched upon issues and elements that can be related to distributed and teacher leadership. They had learned like 'sponges' and were leading activities they suggested themselves as important and interesting. Thus, the PTs seemed to have practised a type of distributed leadership rather than the hierarchical form. However, only one preschool teacher talked about how distributed or teacher leadership could be performed within groups with many preschool teachers but otherwise they did not discuss leadership policies seeing it rather as the PHTs role.

The PHTs and APHTs rhetoric further mirrored collaborative and horizontal leadership within the preschools' groups and they were eager to strengthen the group leaders' role, placing them more clearly in the authority structure. My

research findings for the last thirteen years have revealed that a strong stereotypical 'masculine' hierarchical authority structure exacerbates conflicts and annoyance as it clashes with the more stereotypically 'feminine' horizontal and collaborative structure generally associated with preschools. In the case of such a clash the group leaders function as 'piggies in the middle' with formal demands from the leaders 'above' and micropolitical demands from the ATs 'below'. Whether that will occur where the percentage of preschool teachers is high cannot be known at this point, as my earlier research was undertaken in groups with high percentage of assistant teachers. As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, one of the motivations for this research was my former findings (Jónsdóttir, 2008, 2009) relating to the status of preschool teachers who are not granted formal authority in the decision-making progress, as decisions tended to be made within 'secret sessions' of formal leaders. There I doubted that a professional in this position was capable of seeing her or himself as a leading professional within the preschool and society. I argue that reinforcement of the formal authority of group leaders, thus seeing the PTs and ATs more as one joint group, will make the expertise of preschool teachers more 'invisible' than it already is. According to Fenech *et al.* (2010) the Australian government uses the term *educator* to describe *all professionals*, or rather all staff, working in early childhood education centres. Similarly, Moss (2010) asks if we should focus rather on education and the educator, the purpose of the former and the requirements of the latter, instead of focusing on the concept 'professionalism' and who is a professional and who is not. However, it is arguable whether this development can be seen as raising the status of preschool teachers overall.

5.2 Preschool teachers' identities

As there has not previously been research on preschool teachers' identities in Iceland every finding here is 'new' although there are some similarities to findings of other Nordic research on similar matters. By focusing on the stakeholders' rhetoric, especially that of some parents and politicians, it can be argued that there are underlying downgrading and gendered views supporting a 'layperson oriented identity', 'invisibility' and lack of status for the PTs. Further confirmation of stereotypically gendered attitudes is found in the PHTs' and APHTs' perceptions of how the politicians and the municipality's governance see their work and position, not listening to them or utilising their expertise, seeing them as the 'maids of the system'.

When the preschool teachers' rhetoric was investigated it seemed that they too did not talk about evident differences between them and the assistant teachers, thus also supporting the 'layperson oriented identity'. What is 'new' to me, and can be related to these findings, is Langford's (2010) connection of the ideology of child-centredness and stereotypical gendered views on one hand and the 'invisibility' of the preschool teachers professionalism and expertise on the other. As the Nordic child-centeredness is one characteristic of the good childhood, this invisibility may actually be part of the cultural heritage within Icelandic preschools. Thus it can be argued that if the Icelandic preschool teachers want to change their leadership identity they simultaneously have to change their educational one.

The overall picture of the current situation is that the preschool teachers are choosing to positively construct their meanings and identities within the preschools and this is done in close relationship with children, staff and parents. Their attitude can be summed up as, "not rocking the boat" and avoiding knowing too much about the "cruel world" outside. Issues disturbing that image are seen as threatening and 'negative'. Alongside this the perceptions of the preschool teachers related to the number of children and shorter days for preschool children are 'negatively' affecting their educational identity. They are simultaneously working hard to fulfil the demands of the first school level, new common learning areas, more evaluation and the cut-backs of the recession. To cope with these two different worlds and to survive, the preschool teachers seem to have developed at least twofold identities, the 'positive' and the 'negative' one (Forde *et al.*, 2006; Woods and Jeffrey, 2002; Stronach *et al.*, 2002).

5.3 Implications for the preschool teachers and other stakeholders

There are many things that the preschool teachers can reflect on related to their professional role, leadership and identity connected to the findings of this research, but two things seem utterly urgent. First is that the preschool teachers make up their mind about how they are going to deal with the views of the parents and politicians who do not call strongly on their knowledge and expertise. Secondly, how they are going to raise their professional status within the preschools, preschool field and the society. These tasks they must perform by emphasizing their leading role with children *and adults* (Langford, 2010; Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2011; Woodrow, 2008).

To develop their role and reconstruct their identity, preschool teachers, like other leaders within the preschools, seem to have to acknowledge and make more visible the preschool's educational, economic and social justice functions and then reflect

on and discuss them ethically, first within the preschools and then with other stakeholders, with the aim of mutual understanding. Within these discussions the gender dimension within the preschools, simultaneously related to adults and children, should be acknowledged and addressed (Coleman, 2002; Langford, 2010; Oberhuemer, 2005) as should the function of social justice, and how the rights of children and the situation of families can be addressed in turbulent times with increasing cultural, social and economic diversity. In doing this the PTs, and others within the preschools, will need to recognise and examine both personal and publicly endorsed assumptions and acknowledge that there are 'multiple ways of knowing' (Oberhuemer, 2005, p. 14).

Another crucial element is that the preschool teachers develop a robust leadership identity first and foremost shaped by themselves (Sachs, 2001, 2003; Woodrow, 2008). As Langford (2010) argues the preschool teachers have to be more visible, having authority, agency, social position, status and significance, central within new pedagogy. The new pedagogy is, according to Langford, the reconstruction of children and preschool teachers to work against the invisibility of the professionals within a new democratic space or forum, there connecting to Oberhuemer's (2005) democratic professionalism, Dahlberg *et al's* (2007) and Moss' (2006, 2008) conceptualization of the teacher as a researcher. A connection will thus be established between the ideology of the educational dimension and the leadership dimension of the preschool teachers' professional role. As is recommended in democratic professionalism the most effective leadership is distributed or teacher leadership but the situation within each preschool affects how leadership is conducted.

Further, the preschool teachers should address the role of the parents as participative stakeholders in the preschools' democratic forum (Knopf and Swick, 2007; Moss, 2006, 2008; Oberhuemer, 2005; Rodd, 2006) and consider how they can utilize their knowledge and interest in discussion and participation in the preschools' practice and activities. As Whalley (2006, 2007) argues there are many ways to approach parents, not least those who are usually inactive in the formal discourse.

Implications for other stakeholders

The other stakeholders will be affected by the implications related to the preschool teachers but *preschool and assistant preschool head teachers* should additionally discuss in more detail how they are going to engage with all preschool teachers' expertise and competences in the preschool, both group leaders and

'ordinary' preschool teachers, as well as how they can develop the leadership structure with that dimension in mind.

The *parents* who participated in the research were very enthusiastic, and maybe not a representative sample, but parents of preschool children could become more aware about who are the leading professionals in the field and learn to make additional demands towards them. Only then can the preschool teachers become the researching, reflective, democratic and leading professionals the assistant teachers need for their learning within the preschools, to the benefit of the children.

The *professionals at the preschool office* have done a good job related to the development of the educational role of preschools but they should, like the politicians, be aware that their rhetoric is not downgrading the preschool teachers' expertise. Their focus should be on the leadership roles within preschools in the near future, and like the PHTs they should not take one form of leadership for granted but experiment with new forms e.g. where there is a large proportion of preschool teachers in a preschool.

The *politicians* could be more aware of their discourses connected to the functions of preschools, and their rhetoric related to gender and the 'layperson oriented field'. Further, they could consider more how they are capable of strengthening the professional and leadership roles of preschool teachers and other leaders within the preschools. The preschool is the first school level in the educational system, that is a fact, but a discussion is needed about how that educational function is fulfilled, as well as seeing how the other functions are carried out.

As Gopinathan *et al.*, (2008) argue teachers have to be prepared to work with other stakeholders as "it takes a village to raise a child". Within the municipality the relevant professionals seemed to have developed a sort of educational network to strengthen the educational role of the preschools. Similarly, a leadership network can be strengthened, based on new research findings with the aim of making the leading profession in the preschool field more visible and respected. Further, the new M.Ed. requirement can be seen as an important element in improving and raising the standard of the professionals and of preschool education.

5.4 The research process

When reflecting on whether I could have done something differently in the study I have already indicated that I should have established a pilot study group of preschool teachers, as they were the most hesitant group in discussing their views and perceptions (see section 3.1.5). Further, I could have interviewed the group

leaders and preschool teachers separately, and also the preschool head teachers and assistant head teachers, but it was also interesting to interview them together, with the purpose of comparison within the group. The analysis of the data has taken a lot of time and probably the research questions could have been 'simpler' but it has been challenging to deal with them and has added significantly to my former knowledge and will hopefully provide a suitably nuanced analysis for future development in the preschools.

Recommendations for further research

Although there has already been some research on the educational role of preschool teachers in Iceland, hitherto there has been little research on the leadership and professional identities of preschool teachers and the findings of this research are an addition to the prevailing knowledge. Although there is much to be learnt about the role of all stakeholders in the preschool, in my view the most urgent and appropriate research, based on the findings of this project, would be action research where a new leadership approach could be developed with an emphasis on distributed and teacher leadership within a democratic forum, and where parents would be active participants. According to McNiff (2008) action research is about taking action for educational, social and cultural transformation, thus influencing and changing values, norms, methods and habits, hopefully in the direction of appropriate education and leadership for the preschools, as for the preschool field.

Final words

I really hope that the findings of this research will be of use in debating, both inside and outside preschools, about the professional role, leadership and identities of preschool teachers and thus improving preschool education. That will be done by raising the consciousness and status of the valued professionals working there and is in keeping with the political purpose of the research. With that purpose in mind, I intend to disseminate the findings by presentations in conferences both national and international and in journal articles, both in Icelandic and English. At the same time discussions will draw attention to the important role of preschools in the society and the education of the youngest and most vulnerable stakeholders, the children. And in the end I say as Vandenbroeck (2009): Let us disagree! Otherwise there will be no progress.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Interview questions

Appendix 2 – Reflections on the focus group interviews in December 2009

Appendix 3 – Letter to the preschool committee: Application for permission of conducting the research

Appendix 4 – Letter to the preschool head teachers: Application for permission of conducting the research

Appendix 5 – Informed consent for participation in the research

Appendix 6 – Interview with preschool teachers/group leaders – categorisation

Appendix 7 – Themes emerging in the interviews with stakeholders

Appendix 1

Interview questions, November/ December 2009

Preschool Head Teachers and Assistant Preschool Head Teachers
-Can you describe your professional leadership role and how it has changed in recent years?
-Which are the main influencing factors in those changes?
-Similarly, can you describe the professional roles and leadership of other preschool teachers within the preschool, how those roles have changed in recent years and which are the main influencing factors?
-Are you content with the development, and the present situation, or would you have liked the development different, and if so, how?
-How do you see the preschool activities and the professional and leadership role of preschool teachers (including yours) and the roles of others develop and change into the nearest future?

Group leaders and preschool teachers
-Can you tell me what is embedded in your professional role and leadership with children, staff and parents, and how your role has changed in recent years?
-Which are the main influencing factors in those changes, both within and outside the preschools, effecting your role and practice?
-Similarly, can you tell me how you see the role of the preschool head teacher and assistant preschool head teacher and how they affect your role and practice?
-Are you content with the development, and the present situation, or would you have liked the development different, and if so, how?
-How do you see the preschool activity and the professional and leadership role of preschool teachers and the roles of others develop and change into the nearest future?

Assistant teachers
-Can you tell me what is embedded in your role in the group (class) and your responsibility towards children, other staff and parents?
-How do you see the role of the group leaders and preschool teachers in your group/ preschool and how do you think they support your role and practice?
-What is the main difference between yours and the preschool teachers' role and practice?

-Are you content with your role with children, staff and parents, and the present situation, or would you have liked the development different, and if so, how?

-How do you see the preschool activity, your role and roles of others develop and change into the nearest future?

Professionals at the preschool office

-Can you describe your roles and how it has changed in recent years?

-Which are the main influencing factors in those changes?

-Similarly, how do you see the professional roles and leadership of preschool head teachers, group leaders, and preschool teachers? Do the roles have changed and if so, how and what are the main affecting factors?

-How do you see the role of assistant teachers/ other practitioners?

-Are you content with the development, and the present situation, or would you have liked the development different, and if so, how?

-How do you see the role of preschools, your role and roles of others develop and change into the nearest future?

Parents

-How do you define the role of preschool in the society and what kind of expectations do you have for your preschool child?

-What do you think is embedded in your role as parent of a preschool child and how do you act in that role?

-What do you think is embedded in the professional role and leadership of preschool head teacher, group leaders and preschool teachers within groups and what factors do you think are affecting those roles?

-How do you see the role of assistant teachers or other practitioners in the preschool's groups?

-Are you content with the development and the present situation or would you have liked the development different, and if so, how?

-How do you see the role of preschools, your role and roles of others develop and change into the nearest future?

Politicians

As I interviewed them last, they were asked about issues that had arisen in the interviews with the other groups, as the number of children within groups, the long day of preschool children and the functions of preschools. Additionally they were asked similar questions as the other groups:

-How do you define the role of preschool in the society and what kind of expectations do you have towards them?

-Can you describe your role as a politician in the preschool committee and how do you act in that role?

-Similarly, how do you see the professional roles and leadership of preschool head teachers, group leaders and preschool teachers? Do the roles have changed and if so, how and what are the main affecting factors?

-How do you see the role of assistant teachers/ other practitioners?

-Are you content with the development, and the present situation, or would you have liked the development different, and if so, how?

-How do you see the role of preschools, your role and roles of the professionals and practitioners within the preschools develop and change into the nearest future?

Appendix 2

Reflections on the focus group interviews December 2009

Preschool head teachers and assistant preschool head teachers

<u>My reflections</u>

They talked a lot about the administrative and managerial part of their role but less about the professional part and the role of the educational leader. I was expecting discussions about the ideology, mentoring, and the emphasis of the professional work with children, parents and staff, connected to the National Curriculum. Although the new parents committee was important, it was also a stress factor for the head teachers. It seemed that they were content with the teaching and learning role of the preschool, and did not need to speak about it, but were concerned and frustrated about the parents' role, the parents' attitude towards the preschools, the length of children's staying in the preschool, the framework, or the square meters per each child, the children/staff ratio and the attitude of their executives towards their work (maids of the system). They felt they were not respected or trustworthy; the politicians rather listened to other experts although they had been stressing the same topics for years. The politicians also listened to the voters (parents) in relation to the service role of the preschool (opening hours etc.). They criticised the union because of the number of children in the departments and were very enthusiastic about the welfare and the interests of the children. They criticised the system for demanding hierarchical control and management but at the same time were eager to strengthen the pyramid within the preschool.

<u>My assistant's reflection</u>

-They were concentrating on the subject

-One head teacher especially was politically engaged, dominating the discussion and talked a lot about the executives and their influence; she also talked about her strong sides as head teacher and professional leader.

-One head teacher said: Research has shown …etc. She had to push herself forward to be heard.

-They discussed the framework a lot.

-They hardly mentioned the learning community, CPD or the professional leadership role; although:

> -One of them mentioned that she had difficulties with distributing leadership

> -The conflict between care and education was mentioned by one of them

-One of them talked about utilising the human resources and expertise
-Also the head teachers could depend more now on their assistant head teachers and were able to have a vacation without finishing everything first
-They agreed on the importance of the children's interests and welfare
-They did not talk about performance or criteria, the master education of the preschool teachers, the transition between preschool and primary school, or the legal authorisation of the preschool teachers' role.
-Most of the time they discussed the influence of the local office of education and the centralised administration of the office and politicians (feeling of powerlessness (my interpretation)).

Department leaders and preschool teachers
<u>My reflections</u>

The discussion was quite different from the day before, they did not talk much about managerial things. They had difficulties in differentiating between the roles of the department leader and preschool teacher; it seems there is some kind of flow between the work roles. They were "traditional" rather than "progressive" professionals, although some of their discourse could be connected to democratic professionalism. They were not very critical about the societal context and did not seem to reflect critically about their role in that context. They seemed quite satisfied with their work and they felt they were in harmony with the parents (symbolic interactionism). They did not mention the leadership course, praised by the heads and assistant heads. They did not define themselves as members of the leadership team in the preschool.

<u>My assistant's reflections</u>

They were very cautious about what they were saying, and did not push themselves forward. They needed guidance/ to be led in the discussion, but they were relaxed. There was not much dynamic in the group. They did not talk about themselves as professional leaders. They did not talk much about the recession and did not speak about the National curriculum, laws or regulations, educational level of preschool teachers, their legal status, and transition. Nobody talked about that the department leaders needed more time for preparing their work or to work more outside the departments, or about poor health of the staff group and absence because of that (a very popular discussion among preschool teachers). They are very proud of their work!

Assistant teachers

<u>My reflections</u>

They seemed more secure in their role than the preschool teachers, and they thought they did similar things, except interviewing the parents and having preparation time. They felt they were respected, and their resources and knowledge was utilised. They were reflecting more than the preschool teachers about their role, how they should do this and that, and their relationship and communication with the children, how they learn and what. They were dynamic and bright and they connected within the group while they were discussing the questions. They seemed to be content with their role and have a lot to give. They talked about their own learning connected to the children's learning and communication and they mentioned very few negative things that often pop up in such conversation. If they were unsecure about something they just asked. They did not talk about that they should have preparation time or that the preschool teachers are always in some meetings or that they are not respected, as is not unusual in such discussions. They seemed to have power and were not fighting for their status or respect. The group that affected their work the most was the staff group.

<u>My assistant's reflections</u>

They are smart women, knowing what they are doing and very enthusiastic about their work. They reflected on their methods and small things and the group was dynamic. They think that the job is tough, they are tired in the evenings, they are aware of that they are teaching all the time and they enjoy their work.

Professionals at the preschool office

<u>My reflections</u>

They had a lot to say and I was thinking about the interview with the preschool teachers in comparison. About the professionals: On the one hand they thought they were professionally more self-confident, but on the other hand they talked about them as insecure in relation to the staff. They talked about the preschool teachers (group leaders not included) and the assistant teachers in the same sentences (a part of the discourse). There was a conflict in their discussions about the tight schedules and also about how the roles of head teachers, assistant head and group leaders should develop (traditional and untraditional). It would be great if one or two participants from all of the groups could discuss their opinions!

<u>My assistant's reflection</u>

They are smart and competent women, and strong professionally, reflective and could easily be in conflict and disagree and had solution to problems. They talked about the powerlessness of the department leader and seemed to be in contact with the preschools. They were reflective about professionalism, did not talk about the new education but were very proud of their continuous learning programs and courses, not the least for the department leaders.

Parents

(They are, or have been, in the board of parents' associations or the parents' committees in their children's preschool)

<u>My reflections</u>

This was the last interview and we only talked a little bit about it in the car on our way home. We thought the parents were smart and they did not hesitate to disagree. We were a little bit surprised about their opinion on the roles of preschool teachers and assistant teachers but when I write it up I can see the connections between their opinions and the double or triple role of the preschool in society, or economic, social justice and education. Also when there is no formal distinction between the roles it is understandable that the parents have troubles with the differentiation. There are many interesting matters or topics in this interview and I can see that it can be a bit complicated to compare it with the others.

Appendix 3

xxxxxxxx Preschools committee
xxxxxxxx Preschool director

Subject: Application for permission to conduct research on preschool teachers' professional roles and leadership.

The undersigned, Arna H. Jónsdóttir, doctoral student in the EdD International Programme, Institute of Education, University of London, hereby applies for permission to conduct research in three of the municipality's preschools, and among relevant stakeholders. The research is the final part of my doctoral study (the Thesis) but previously I have submitted four assignments and a Portfolio (ca. 20.000 words), an Institution Focused Study (ca. 20.000 words) and now I am working on the thesis (40.000-45.000 words). The title of the thesis is *The Professional Role and Leadership of Preschool Teachers: Definitions and Development*. The thesis will be written in English, kept in the Institute's library but most likely be accessible in universities' libraries in Iceland. Further, my plan is to write articles in both Icelandic and foreign journals.

The research is qualitative where I will carry out focus group interviews with preschool teachers, group leaders, head and assistant head teachers, assistant teachers, parents, and professionals at the preschool office. In the interviews I will have an assistant, or moderator, who is a master student in the School of Education, University of Iceland. The assistant's role is to observe and take notes, e.g. about interaction within the groups during the interviews.

In the research plan the choice of the relevant preschools is supported with the arguments that they will be similar in size and have a similar number of children and percentage of preschool teachers. When choosing the preschools I will seek information in „Tölfræðilegar upplýsingar 2008" [Statistical information 2008] (http://www.kopavogur.is/files/leikskolar/tolulegarupplysingar_2008.pdf) and contact the preschool director about possible changes of these facts during the year 2009.

I will contact the preschool head teachers in each preschool and ask for their permission and with the same purpose contact the preschool director on behalf of the professionals at the preschool office.

In each preschool the participants will be the head teacher, assistant head teacher, one group leader, one preschool teacher, two assistant teachers and two parents' representatives. I will choose the participants in collaboration with these groups. I will also ask the preschool director about the professionals at the

preschool office and who I should contact there. The focus groups will be homogeneous, which means that e.g. the top leaders within the preschools form one group, group leaders/ preschool teachers the next one etc. Further, my plan is to interview politicians individually and I will contact them individually.

As soon as relevant permissions are granted I will introduce the research method and the process in details to the participants and ask each one to give an 'informed consent' about his or her participation in the research. Further I will report on how I am going to disseminate the findings in the research process as after I have submitted the thesis, which I intend to do within one year.

The data gathering will take four to six weeks and I will start working on it as soon as all permissions are granted and I have contacted the preschools and the preschool director.

In research there can arise ethical tensions or matters of opinions and because of the closeness of the researcher and the participants the researcher who is a former associate has to prepare the process extremely well and show everybody loyalty and respect. One of the vulnerable issues is that the researcher has to protect the anonymity of participants, preschools and municipality, which can be difficult in a small society as Iceland.

I will do my best, when presenting the findings, to protect the anonymity of the relevant participants but if the participants themselves choose to inform others about their participation, the researcher cannot be responsible.

I am ready to discuss the research if requested and below there is a link to a website where information about my EdD study within the Institute of Education can be found.

http://www.ioe.ac.uk/study/researchDegrees/RED9_EDUINT.html

Best regards,

Arna H. Jónsdóttir

Lector in Early Childhood Education and Leadership, School of Education,

University of Iceland and doctoral student in Institute of Education,

University of London

arnahj@hi.is, tel. 861 1434

Appendix 4

Dear head teacher of the preschool xxxxxxx

Xxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

Subject: Application for permission to conduct research on preschool teachers' professional roles and leadership.

The undersigned, Arna H. Jónsdóttir, doctoral student in the EdD International Programme, Institute of Education, University of London, has been granted the permission to carry out research within three preschool in the municipality, and with the relevant stakeholders.

The research is the final part of my doctoral study (the Thesis) but previously I have submitted four assignments and a Portfolio (ca. 20.000 words), an Institution Focused Study (ca. 20.000 words) and now I am working on the thesis (40.000-45.000 words). The title of the thesis is *The Professional Role and Leadership of Preschool Teachers: Definitions and Development*. The thesis will be written in English, kept in the Institute's library but most likely will be accessible in universities' libraries in Iceland. Further, my plan is to write articles in both Icelandic and foreign journals.

The research is qualitative where I will carry out focus group interviews with preschool teachers, group leaders, head and assistant head teachers, assistant teachers, parents, and professionals at the preschool office. In the interviews I will have an assistant, or moderator, who is a master student in the School of Education, University of Iceland. The assistant's role is to observe and take notes, e.g. about interaction within the groups during the interviews.

In the research plan the choice of the relevant preschools is supported with the arguments that they will be similar in size, have similar numbers of children and percentage of preschool teachers. When choosing the preschools I accessed information from „Tölfræðilegar upplýsingar 2008" [Statistical information, 2008] on the municipality's website and contacted the preschool director about possible changes of these facts during the year 2009.

The purpose of this letter is to seek your admission for choosing interviewees from the staff group and the parents' association who would form a focus group together with participants from two other preschools.

In each preschool the participants will be the head teacher, assistant head teacher, one group leaders, one preschool teacher, two assistant teachers and two parents' representatives. I will choose the participants in collaboration with these

groups. I will also ask the preschool director about the professionals at the preschool office and who I should contact there. The focus groups will be homogeneous, which means that e.g. the top leaders within the preschools form one group, group leaders/ preschool teachers the next one etc. Further, my plan is to interview politicians individually and I will contact them individually.

If you, as the head teacher of the preschool, grant the permission for the research I will ask the participants to sign an 'informed consent' where I introduce the research method and the process in details for each one. Further I will report on how I am going to disseminate the findings in the research process after I have submitted the thesis, which I intend to do within one year.

Before the interviews take place I will send the main interview questions to the relevant participants, but in a research like this other issues can emerge that the researcher has not thought of beforehand.

I assume that you will discuss the matters in this letter with your staff and I hope that you can give me your answer regarding the permission within a week. If the answer is positive I would like to visit the preschool, get to know your educational policy and practice, discuss the planned research and meet possible participants. Further, I would like to have information about the parents' association or the parents' council so I can ask them to nominate representatives to the parents' focus group.

The data gathering will start as soon as the permissions have been granted and the participants have undersigned the informed consent. I expect that the focus groups interviews will have to take place in the beginning or the end of the working day and even in the evenings and it is urgent that the participants realise that.

In a research like this there can arise ethical issues or matters of opinions and because of the closeness of the researcher and the participants the former associate has to prepare the process extremely well and show everybody loyalty and respect. One of the vulnerable issues is that the researcher has to protect the anonymity of participants, preschools and municipality, which can be difficult in a small society as Iceland.

I will do my best, when presenting the findings, to protect the anonymity of the relevant participants but if the participants themselves choose to inform others about their participation, the researcher cannot be responsible.

I am ready to discuss the research if requested and below there is a link to a website where information about my EdD study within the Institute of Education can be found.

http://www.ioe.ac.uk/study/researchDegrees/RED9_EDUINT.html

Best regards,

Arna H. Jónsdóttir

Lector in Early Childhood Education and Leadership, School of Education,

University of Iceland and doctoral student in Institute of Education,

University of London

arnahj@hi.is, tel. 861 1434

Appendix 5

Informed consent for participation in the research:
The Professional Role and Leadership of Preschool Teachers:
Definitions and Development

The research: The purpose of the research is to explore how preschool teachers and other relevant stakeholders, i.e. other staff, parents and professionals at the preschool office, define the professional role and leadership of preschool teachers. Further, it will be investigated if and how these definitions affect the preschool teachers' professional identities and practice. Additionally, information will be gathered on what contextual factors are affecting the professional role and leadership of the preschool teachers.

The participants come from three preschools and the preschool office and the data will be gathered in five focus groups, according to the table below:

Group 1 **Preschool head and assistant head teachers**	Group 2 **Preschool teachers**	Group 3 **Other staff**	Group 4 **Professionals at the preschool office**	Group 5 **Parents**
One head teacher and one assistant head teacher from each preschool.	One group leader and one preschool teacher from each preschool.	Two staff members from each preschool, reflecting the group of other staff.	Directors and pedagogical consultants from the preschools' office.	Two parents from the association of each preschool.

Researcher: Arna H. Jónsdóttir, student in the EdD International Programme, Institute of Education, University of London, and assistant professor in School of Education, University of Iceland.

Participant: xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

Information about the research process: The researcher asks the participant named above to confirm their participation in a focus group interview based on following information.

In the parents' focus group there will be two participants from three preschools, six participants in total. Participants will get the main questions sent to her or him before the interview to reflect on but must also be prepared to respond to questions and issues coming from the participants themselves. The aim is to have one interview with each group, and the estimated duration of each interview is one to two hours. Participants are asked to allow another interview if the researcher thinks

it is necessary. The researcher is in charge of the interviews and leads them but there will also be an assistant present. The interviews are meant to take place either at the beginning or in the end of the working day, or even in the evenings within one of those three preschools. The participation is based on the individual's own free will and he or she can at any time decide that she or he no longer will be involved in the research process.

The focus group interview will be recorded and transcribed in a computer, although not by the researcher. Every participant will get the transcription from his or her focus group to read and can make comments and request at that point that certain information will not be used in the research or will not be used by the researcher in direct quoting. The researcher kindly asks for permission to use the data in her thesis in presentations at conferences, e.g. FUM in February 2002, SRR in May and October 2010, and EECERA in August 2010. Further, the researcher asks for permission to use the data in writing journal articles, both during the research process, and in the wake of the submission of the thesis.

One of the vulnerable issues in every research is the anonymity of the participants. which can be difficult to keep in a small society such as Iceland. I will do my best, when presenting the findings, to protect the anonymity of the relevant participants but it is to be expected that the participants will recognise each other's responses and answers. On the other hand, if participants themselves choose to inform others about their participation, the researcher cannot be counted as responsible.

When working with the data extreme caution will be practiced and the data will be kept in a secure place. Further, the data will be deleted from the researcher's computer as soon as she has introduced the findings orally and in writing.

<div align="center">xxxxxx, December 1st 2009</div>

<div align="center">I the undersigned, hereby grant my informed consent for participation in the research *The Professional Role and Leadership of Preschool Teachers: Definitions and Development*.</div>

<div align="center">--</div>

<div align="center">xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx</div>

Appendix 6

Interview with preschool teachers/ group leaders – categorisation

Translation of the first six pages

There were six participants in the group and the numbers are identifying them.

Light blue: Professional role regarding children

Green: Parents

Dark blue: Leadership of PHTs and APHTs (positive factors)

Pink: Leadership of GLs

Red: Influencing factors, political policy (negative factors)

Grey: Expertise, status and respect

Violet: The future

Black: The researcher (A)

A: How would you describe your professional role today?

1: We have a new curriculum, a curriculum for the oldest children, I am working with them. With the curriculum you have to dig deeper into the learning. There are more demands from the primary schools, parents and we are diagnosing more, if children have some difficulties, so they ... and it is an early intervention. We thus begin earlier, even before the child is diagnosed. That makes the work so ...it has changed.

2. Now it is more service which people is buying. It is normal ... I have not worked a long time; my mother is a preschool teacher too and has always been. Then children stayed just half day, before noon or in the afternoon or something. Now it is normal that they, you know, everybody goes to preschool and so it is. This is a lot of service to parents.

A: A service to parents?

2: Yes a bit, as with the opening hours of the preschools and such things. It is a bit looked at. You know, there are politicians deciding about that, not the preschool head teacher or the staff, what we should offer.

1: The opening hours were longer in the old days. When I was beginning to work 15 years ago then there were children staying four hours in the mornings. When they went home and other ones came and stayed four, five hours and some were staying the whole day. With this arrangement we had to repeat ourselves in our work because of the children that arrived at noon. But today all children arrive at 7:30 to 8:00, maybe some around 9:00, and they are all staying eight or nine hours. Thus, we do not have to repeat ourselves; we have it more varied and include other factors.

5: I think that parents ... these demands, I think there are much more demands from the parents. They are more involved (in the matter – another one adds). It is maybe because everything is in the computer and that is more ...

4: They have become much more aware of our practice.

A: Yes, how?

4: They want to know more.

6: There has to be more transparency.

5: But in the old days there were very different views. I was always working in a day care centre and I felt that the parents' demands were rather different in day care and preschools.

5: Because I thought ... women were staying more at home and could choose if they put their children in preschool or not and reflect on what they got for their money or something, but I thought, or you never perceived those demands related to the day care children. I always felt it was about hygiene there and demands of handicrafts on the other side but now the demands are different and people are much more attentive.

1: This choice, when people had the availability to send the children only the half day then it was more of a choice, to send or not send them. But the parents of the children that stayed the whole day they had no choice, they had to.

5: And they made different demands, those hygiene demands.

A: So now ...

1: Yes, because their prerequisites were different.

A: So, do all the parents now choose to have the children the whole day in preschools?

Everybody: Yes, yes.

A: Or do they have to?

4: Our work is important and what we are doing.

A: But how would you describe ... because now you have been saying that the parents are important collaborators and we are talking about the factors that are affecting your work, you know, both within and outside preschools... then are you saying that parents have significant effects on your role and how it develops?

4: Yes, but also other factors, which has given me much in this job, all those years, that is when we are participating in all kinds of projects, developmental projects. We that are working with the youngest ones, participated in making a curriculum for them, and we participated with ... in a certain project, and this is all an extra work, but I perceive that it is increasing our knowledge and we become more conscious about what we are doing. There is always a new spark to make us think of what we are doing ... I think it is ... we always get something new. Otherwise you do not bother ... you can forget yourself ...

A: In the routine?

4: Yes. At least I think it is rather motivating and we have been participating a lot in developmental projects in recent years.

3. I am working with the youngest children with the one year olds. It is amusing how many parents are asking and want to know what we have been doing during the day and you are hearing about unbelievable demands about the children's competences. But they are incredibly smart and are incredibly competent. It is as if they are born around their confirmation age although they are only one year old. But of course there have been huge changes since I graduated in '79 and started working. Then there was quite another culture. The parents just came

with their children they were going to work and then just fetched them and goodbye. Now the parents are much more conscious and I think that one of the reason is that of course the preschool teachers have been fighting and making the activity more visible, been more and more conscious and that the demands from the parents can be connected to our actions and we can thank ourselves so to speak as we have made the importance of preschool education more apparent and from there a circle has developed and laid the foundation of the parents' consciousness which shows that preschool teachers are doing great in advertising their job, marketising themselves shall we call it and making the importance of the first years visible.

4: Although these first years are connected to care then it is as important as any other emphasis.

3: If the children are not cared for in their first years then they are destroyed for the rest of their lives. By caring they are attaining security and they are gaining motivation to learn to interact with one another and are just loved (and get the right motivation, another one adds), yes, and are just embraced and hugged, that they feel that they exist, that they can cry ...

6: You are mentioning how much teaching is embedded in the caring. It is of huge importance to me.

3. And the interactions; that they learn to interact and appreciate each other. As I am saying, one year old children, they are incredibly smart, handing to each other, comforting each other. I do not know where they are coming from; you can almost see their wings and circle of light.

4. I think it is a privilege to work with the youngest group with twelve children.

3: Yes, exactly.

4. It is incredible, incredibly neat.

A: Thus, you do not perceive that it is bad for children to be in preschools at one year old.

4: I do not think it is bad for them if they are cared for and are not too many in the group and are not staying too long.

1: I think it is a far too long time for a one year old to stay eight, nine hours each day.

2: Four to six hours are enough.

3: That is quite another story; they are staying for too long a time.

2: But also about the service that the parents are buying and they are very conscious about the preschools' educational emphasis. They are choosing as there are two, three schools in their neighbourhood. And that is their choice, you know, environmental school, health school and you know ...

3: It is still the preschool teachers' work. They are varied in their policies, are marketising and making the education more visible and thus you have a choice, you are aware of that. If there were total silence and nothing happening then ...

6: Yes and the teacher has to be conscious about his or her beliefs.

3: Exactly

6: You cannot go into some school and work in accordance with a policy that is not you.

Everybody: No.

6: I really think you have to be significantly aware of what your beliefs are as a teacher.

3: Just like the parents choose the preschool for their children, we do the same for us.

1: Yes, otherwise we do not develop in the workplace, it is a bit like that, and the policies are different and ...

A: If you think about your schools? Are the policies different?

2. Of course there is always something we have in common, environmental emphasis at least.

5. We are participating in a European developmental project and recycling, maybe more in the older groups but although also ... yes, values and the environment.

A: When you think of the demands the parents are making and how you want to work yourselves, is there a difference there or is there a consistency?

6: I think there is a consistency.

3. Yes I think so too, I quite agree.

6: I agree with [x] that it sort of began with us, as we were making us more visible and became noticeable and thus we made our work more transparent, with the motive of getting higher salaries. By making everything more transparent, then people know when they are coming here and we keep on introducing ourselves attaining the honour for our work, then we have sort of got what we wanted.

3. Yes, and additionally given the parents a choice.

1. Exactly, and thus everybody is benefitting.

A: How would you phrase the main concepts that describe what you are talking about ... somebody mentioned service, you have been talking about learning and all that. So, what is a preschool education in a nutshell?

6: Interactions, respect.

4: Interactions number one, two and three the whole day and you build on that.

3. I think that the concept 'service' is not appropriate; I think it strikes (Yes I agree another one says).

A: Somebody mentioned it.

3. I do not think it is the right concept. I perceive it as when we are going to our work and hopefully we look forward to it. It is supposed to be an exciting place for the children to enter and the parents are attending their work and the children are in their environment. Of course this is an ideal thinking that everybody is attending an amusing place where they feel well are dealing with suitable activities and new demands, are seeing results and meeting with each other.

5. Interactions and education.

Somebody: Yes, interactions and education..

6: All learning is taking place in interactions; I think you have to...

5: Yes, and it is very hard to add to it if you cannot interact.

6: You simply cannot open your mouth in the preschool without knowing what you are going to say and how you are going to say it.

A: No, (Arna laughs). So now we are back to the concepts I sent to you in the email: What is embedded in your professional role and leadership? Is that what it is about, interaction, teaching, education or ...

2. Teaching, learning and social competence.

3: Social competence where they experience a good intimacy and learn to respect each other. How do you put it: To respect different individuals. They start already at one year old, you notice that.

A: Yes, how remarkable.

3: Somebody plods along a doll and if she loses it the other children fetch it and give it to her because they know she needs it. This is respect for her needs and they bring each other the pacifier and then they are ... This is pure respect for each other and intimacy, great interaction and they have already learnt it.

Appendix 7

Themes emerging in the interviews with stakeholders

Themes in interviews	Themes to be developed in literature review
Introduction	I will use what I already have, but add to it international and Scandinavian dimensions to shed light on the Icelandic context
Key finding: -Everything that is making it difficult to work as a professional (as they define it) affects the meaning of the work (in all positions) **The GLs and PTs** -Emphasising the work with children and parents **Affecting the professional role** - In agreement with parents (positive) -Too many children (negative) -Children are staying too long, more service (negative) (Here I am going to refer to how the PHT and APHT sense that children are staying too long) **Experts or laymen (GLs and PTs)** -The educational role The leadership role -Piggies in the middle	I will use what I already have about the definitions of professionalism (especially democratic which has been discussed in relation to preschools); Further, how the changes in the current policy context influence the professional role -Stakeholders' definition of quality (some research, e.g. Icelandic about parents' view) -Too many children/ structure (research is hard to find, there is one Scandinavian) -Expert or a layperson (a very hot discussion, e.g. in Norway; research has been done there and we are going to do it as well in Iceland) -The trend to strengthen the pyramid (as a solution to meet the administrative demands); a bit more about hierarchical and distributed leadership.
Affecting the professional identity They talk about children, parents and the educational side of their role, and factors influencing it; they hardly mention consultants, and politicians only in connection with the emphasis on service; They feel they are becoming more professional, the parents seem to acknowledge their job and both professionals and parents like the job of the assistant teachers; they do not see themselves as leaders; a question mark raised towards the service dimension, they are at least not suffering as the head teachers; maybe because they are not as near the preschool office and politicians.	-I have to read more about professional identity; what is it, how it is affected.

Sample of the categorising of interview themes – all focus group interviews

Light blue: Professional role regarding children
Green: Parents
Dark blue: Leadership of PHTs and APHTs (positive factors)
Pink: Leadership of GLs
Red: Influencing factors, political policy (negative factors)
Grey: Expertise, status and respect
Violet: The future

Interaction with parents

Preschool teachers and group leaders

-The service to parents is more obvious and in accordance with the political emphasis.
-They all agreed that the parents make more educational demands than before.
-Preschool teachers' marketing of the education, or how they have made the educational role of the preschool more visible, have made the parents more aware of the importance of the first years, so the preschool teachers can thank themselves for the parents' educational demands (a circle); the homepages on the web have helped there.
-They sense that parents and preschool teachers are in agreement with the main educational emphasis in the preschools' curriculum and methods.

PHT and APHT about the collaboration to parents

-The demands are always getting tougher and tougher, now the head teachers should sit in the parental committees within the preschools.
-Parents see the preschool as service, care and school, in that order.
-Some parents want their children to stay a very long time in the preschool although they are staying at home themselves (without a job or with a younger child), the preschool child must feel rejected!
-We are damaging individuals, their psychological health.
-The children should have the right to be more with their parents; nobody is talking about family values in connection with the work anymore.
-The history will judge us: Why did we allow the children to stay so many hours daily in the preschool! We are too entertaining and interesting!!

-The societal situation is to blame, we have to change the society, the tense is huge, the children are breathing fast because of stress, and the institutionalising is complete.

-Our knowledge is not utilised, the politicians do not listen, but when other specialists say the same things the politicians listen (i.e. psychologist).

-The politicians rather listen to the voters (parents) and their needs for more service.

-What do academics think when they listen to that one year old child is staying 9 hours in the preschool, in 3 square meters!

-We have to guide, inform and support the parents; we are partners, and we should ask the academics and researchers to join us.

-They are inspired by the book "The years no one remembers" (Sæunn, the psychologist) where the emphasis is on the attachment between parents and child in the first years of life; some have told the parents about the book; some preschool teachers have used the book when interviewing parents.

Assistant teachers

-They are inspired by the book "The years no one remembers" (Sæunn, the psychologist) where the emphasis is on the attachment between parents and child in the first years of life; some have told the parents about the book; some preschool teachers have used the book when interviewing parents.

-We have to change the society.

-AT are wondering about why the parents do not fetch the children earlier when they are staying at home themselves; the parents say that the children have no one to play with; the parents are in the gym.

-One told a story about parents who let the child stay a long time in the preschool, although they are having parental leave; other mentioned parents that did the opposite thing.

-The parents were very understanding when we asked them to fetch the young children before 16.00 pm.

-The preschool education is not respected enough in the society; we express our views in such circumstances and talk about all the good work that is done there.

-Parents seem to buy only one sport for their child now to practice, beside the preschool, there were many before, and the children were exhausted.

-I hope that the children can stay in the preschool, it is much better for some of them than be staying at home.

-The five minutes in the morning and evening are the most important, when the child arrives and leaves, you have to have positive attitudes towards the parents; they spread the word.

<u>Parents about collaboration/ their role</u>

-We are not a typical group of parents; parents are in overall rather passive or inactive group.

-To participate in the parents' association support the head teacher if there is something that needs to be done; contact the preschool office.

-The new parents' committees have not been put to the test yet.

-One said: We should support good activity and have professional supervision or control; not just behave like a hallelujah chorus; I hope the committees will do that.

-The head teacher is really in control, it is up to her how much power the committee makes use of.

-We could possibly be more motivating, encouraging, writing letters, articles.

-The parents do not even all arrive when their child is performing or introducing its work; there are always the same parents that participate and those who do not.

-The parents have to sense that their children are well and content in the preschool; it is hard when there is a conflict in the beginning and at the end of the day.

-Collaborate with the preschool on the education; to know what is going on so you can talk to the child about it; to be in good relationship with the staff in the departments.

-To be active and concerned; one father always sweeps the floor when he arrives, it is homey.

-If the participants are not content with what is going on they complain and criticise or ask for explanation.

-You stand up and fight for your child!!

-I am concerned about is that the children should be met on individual basis, as they are, and their ideas, interest and play is met without prejudices or depreciation.

-The fathers were worried about the attitude towards their active sons in this feminine community.

-They mention examples: A discussion a father had with the department leader in a meeting about boys' needs for games and movement instead of just choosing between colouring, playing with pearls or in the family corner, and about bringing weapons on "toyday" when they can bring toys from home; and asking for explanation about why the four years old were learning about the UN children's convention instead of playing with unit blocks.

-I will not complain while my daughter is feeling well.

Directors and consultants

-The professional demands are huge towards the head teachers, especially from parents, and sometimes the demands can become enormous and unrealistic.

Pol1

-The role is to take care of basic education and upbringing, but although we want to focus mainly on the educational role, the preschool is also a place where the children stay while their parents are at work and when that basic role is out of order there are troubles arising; it takes much longer time for the professional role not to function.

-My party emphasised that children could start in preschools at one year old; that they could start in the preschool in the wake of the maternity leave (they can start at one year old now).

-We have altered the settings in many preschools so they are more suitable for the one year old now.

-I have to admit that in the beginning of my political career I listened first and foremost to the parents; they are bigger group, as voters, than the preschool teachers; I think I can see many sides of the matters now.

I was for example determined to make the choices of parents regarding summer vacations more flexible than it is (parents can choose 4 weeks within a 6 weeks period, the preschool is closed two weeks in the middle), but the recession has put that on hold.

-Parents are often in trouble with such arrangement and I do not like it when people have to drive their children at high speed between relatives.

-I would like to see that parents could arrange for longer vacation, more weeks, even the whole summer, and would not be charged for that period (parents have one month without charge during the school year) and there would be a kind of compulsory education during winter, like in other school levels.

-The preschool head teachers would like to close the school for four weeks during the summer where everybody, children, parents, staff, has vacation at the same time (formal closure and beginning of the school year).

-I listen and talk to professionals and parents now; the basic values are similar; children should not stay too long in the preschool, "except my child because I need it".

-I am totally against a preschool free of charge, totally!! But we could discuss some variations, like a part of the staying could be free and thereby we accept the fundamental or compulsory education.

-Children are very young when they are staying up to 8 hours in the preschool;

-We have to be down to earth when we are defining what a school is; sometimes it can be hard to debate with preschool teachers because "the preschool (education, teaching) endures 8 hours daily, and they are no childminders".

-We are limiting the staying of children in preschools to 8 hours, it is hopefully better for children and families, and also we save some money by trimming down positions of staff; if parents are in trouble they can buy extra time which is more expensive.

-I do not know about the parents' opinion on this, but I think that the majority will understand.

Pol2

-We have to reconsider everything because of the recession; my party talked about preschool free of charge for the children before the elections (first level of schooling)

-When I have been visiting preschools I have admired everybody, both children and adults, not the least because of the noisy environment; I think that is a very important thing to take care of.

-In fact the children have no spokesman or representative in the committee; the parents should be but they are often assessing how the operations fit their working day.

-I pity the children because of their long staying in the preschool, even 9-10 hours.

-The head teachers, although, are very determined about shortening the opening hours of the preschools and the hours the children are staying in the preschool.

-In the preschool committee primarily the parents are against the reduction of opening hours of the preschools; probably everything will be "crazy" in the community when we decide something like that.

-It is good to have all those educational programmes and emphasis within the preschools but I think that parents are not first and foremost choosing programmes but rather being practical in their choice.

-The representatives of the head teachers and staff often agree, but the parent often stands alone.

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