

# Swedish Final Year Early Childhood Preservice Teachers' Attitudes, Concerns and Intentions towards Inclusion

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## Abstract

This article explores ninety-seven ( $n=97$ ) Swedish Early Childhood (EC) preservice teachers' attitudes, concerns, and intentions to include children with disabilities in regular classrooms. A six-part self-reporting questionnaire was used to examine participants' attitudes, concerns, efficacy, and intentions toward inclusion. The results showed that although the Swedish EC preservice teachers' in this study expressed 'some' concern about working with children the results indicated a high degree of teacher efficacy. To determine predictors of participants' intentions and use of inclusive practices a series of regression analysis were undertaken. Knowledge of local legislation emerged as significant predictor of participants' intention scores. Teaching efficacy scores were significant predictors for both intention and use of inclusive practices. The results are discussed in the context of the Swedish idea 'a school for all' with a focus on the Swedish preschool teacher education program.

**Key Words:** Swedish Early Childhood Teacher Education, A School for All, Educational Policy, Inclusion, Attitudes, Concerns, Special Needs.

The Swedish idea for inclusive education is commonly referred to as, 'a school for all'. This concept of inclusive education is seen among all educational stakeholders including preservice teachers and citizens, as self-evident. It is perceived as a fundamental aspect of Sweden's identity, its' democracy, and its commitment to the welfare state where the focus is on the health and well-being of its citizens. The basis of the 'welfare' state is in itself an inclusive concept.

Inclusion of all children in schooling is a well-established policy based on egalitarian principles and embedded in the Swedish Education Act where it has been since the 1960s (Gerrbo, 2012; Persson, 2015). Sweden is committed to the continuous provision of a free comprehensive education where "all children, young people and

adults should be given the opportunity to test and develop their ability and their skills to their full potential, irrespective of age, gender or disability" (Ministry of Education & Research, 2016, p. 5). This perspective aligns and underpins a number of international conventions, such as the United Nations (UN) Conventions on the Right of the Child, (United Nations, 1989), the UN Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 1993), and UNESCO's Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (UNESCO, 1994) to prevent exclusionary activities in schooling (Berhanu, 2011).

Given the strong focus on inclusion, Swedish teacher education plays an important role in trying to shape positive

attitudes and beliefs of future teachers. Swedish teacher education starts with the training of early childhood (EC) and preschool teachers who are the first to encounter young children entering school for the first time. It is for this reason early childhood teacher education was chosen as a focus in this study. This paper reports on the attitudes, concerns, and intentions of future early childhood teachers (pre-service teachers in their final year of teacher education). There have been few studies in Sweden exploring the beliefs and attitudes of early childhood pre-service teachers about inclusion. Given that the pre-service teachers will soon be graduating and working as teachers, it is important to create an understanding about their current attitudes and beliefs around inclusion. The next part of the paper shares an understanding of the Swedish context.

### Swedish Preschools

Inclusion of all children begins in the Swedish Förskola or preschool (Preschool is a direct translation from the Swedish word Förskola). Eighty-four per cent of all Swedish children between the ages of 1 to 5 attend mainstream preschool including children with diverse and special needs (Gabrielsson, 2017; Skolverket, 2010; Skollagen 2011; Skollagen 2010; Zakirova Engstrand & Roll-Petersson, 2012). While it is not possible to obtain exact number of children with special needs attending Swedish preschools, or the newly implemented and compulsory pre-school class that children begin the year they turn 6 (Skolverket, 2017) there are studies suggesting that this is a growing area of concern. Research suggests that every fourth child attending a Swedish preschool is in need of special support (Gustafsson, Proczkowska-Björklund, & Gustafsson, 2017; Malmqvist, 2016; Renblad & Blodin, 2014).

At present Sweden is experiencing an acute lack of qualified EC/Preschools teachers, which has led to unqualified personnel working in Swedish EC/Preschool settings often without any teaching qualifications or experience (Gustafsson et al., 2010; Skolverket, 2017). In response, the Swedish School Commission (2017) has put forward recommendations of alternative pathways to support EC/Preschool staff without formal qualification to obtain child-care certification while working in EC/Preschool settings. A fast-track program to support qualified teachers from non-Swedish backgrounds to register as teachers has also been approved and will commence in 2018 (Larsson, Antelius, & Sellin 2017; Swedish School Commission, 2017).

### Early Childhood Teacher Education

To become an EC/Preschool teacher takes 3.5 years of university study. The content taught in the Early Childhood Bachelor degrees varies across the 25 universities in Sweden but common to all are, early childhood education studies (120 credit points), studies in pedagogy

and scientific core subjects (e.g., mathematics, literacy, science), (60 credit points), as well as professional experience (30 credits). Students are required to write an independent thesis worth 15 credit points to reach the total accumulation of 210 higher education credit points needed to qualify as a preschool teacher (Persson, 2015; Takala, Wickman, Uusitalo-Malmivaara, & Lundström, 2015).

Teacher education programs in Sweden do not offer undergraduate preservice teachers special needs education. To work as a Special Needs teacher or as a Special Pedagogue requires a postgraduate qualification that qualified EC/Preschool teachers are eligible to apply for after 3 years of teaching experience in a preschool setting. However, there are subjects offered in special needs that interested EC/Preschool preservice teachers can study in addition to the compulsory subjects in the teaching degree.

The 3.5 year (7 terms) EC/Preschool teacher education program offered at the University where the study was situated does not offer special needs or inclusive education subjects. Rather an overview of different perspectives about special pedagogy are presented by specialist lecturers in the subject titled *Social Relationships and Perspectives on Special Pedagogy for EC/Preschool Teachers* (Sociala relationer och specialpedagogiska perspektiv för förskollärare). Other subjects offered in the EC/Preschool teaching degree include, Sustainable development and global perspectives, intercultural perspectives, mathematics in early childhood, art, aesthetics, and learning, development and didactics, play, learning and care, children's language and communication, organizational development, governing systems, monitoring and analysis of steering documents. Also included are subjects on social relations, conflict resolution and leadership in early childhood, engagement and partnerships with community and families, preschool teacher profession, and research-based practices as well as 30-days of professional experience in a preschool setting.

Each subject is offered in the EC/Preschool teacher education program and taught by experienced and specialist teacher educators with extensive experience working and or teaching with children with a variety of special needs. The assumption is that these teacher educators' can infuse their experience into the subject matter they teach. The idea of infusion in teacher education programs is not a novel or new idea (see DePauw & Goc Karp, 1994; Kowalski, 1995). The benefits of infusing special needs subject matter across the Swedish EC/Preschool teacher education program includes; an increased general knowledge and understanding about children with a variety of special needs. An increase in reflective practices how to support children with a variety of special needs and the development of new teaching and learning skills that are shared and discussed with peers, teacher educators and supervising teachers during profes-

sional experiences. The elimination of stigma and importantly a commitment to equity, and social justice that the Swedish education policy of 'a school for all' represents.

Often high quality inclusive teacher education programs are those that are not just those subjects focused on imparting technical information about how to do inclusion but also provide a strong rationale behind inclusive education (Rouse, 2010). Teacher educators in such programs put in additional efforts to make sure that graduates complete the program and are ready with heart (beliefs), head (knowledge and skills) and hands (ability to put theory into practice) of inclusive educators (Rouse, 2010).

### Development of Attitude

Positive teacher attitudes and high levels of self-efficacy towards inclusion are critical to ensure that all children experience being included into mainstream classrooms (Einarsdottir, 2013; Gabriellson, 2017; Sharma, 2015; Zakirova Engstrand & Roll-Petersson). A way to understand the development of attitudes is by "...the observable consequences of customs, practices, ideologies, values, norms factual beliefs and religious beliefs" (World Health Organization, (WHO), 2007. p. 207). This links to a definition of attitude as "a learned, evaluative response about an object or an issue and ... a cumulative result of personal beliefs" (Chambers & Forlin, 2010, p.74). This means that attitudes consist of cognitive, behavioral, and affective components are formed by beliefs, experiences, and environmental / cultural factors. For example, in Sweden, the formation of positive attitudes towards children with special needs will often begin with, and relates to, personal experiences, whether these experiences involve relating to one's own child, to other children, a sibling, a family member, or a close friend with special needs.

The cultural and or environmental messages received begin in preschool, where all children regardless of special needs are welcome. Hence, the positive attitudes about inclusion that is noted among Swedish and other Scandinavian preservice teachers' can be attributed to the strong cultural traditions, values and confidence in the national policy relating to social justice and equality (Takala, Wickman, Uusitalo-Malmivaara, & Lundström, 2015). In Sweden, as in other Nordic countries, where the established welfare systems provide the specialized support structures designed to meet the needs of learners with special needs provides preservice teachers and teachers a sense of confidence in their welfare and educational systems and their subsequent policies (Nel et al., 2011; Moen, Nielssen, & Weidman, 2007; Takala et al., 2015). The specialized support offered by Swedish *special needs teachers* in the classroom or the *special needs pedagogues* with expertise and a responsibility providing organizational advice to the school requires postgraduate studies. Classroom teachers' interested

in either area of specialization are eligible for postgraduate study after three years working experience in the classroom (Sheridan & Garvis, 2017; Persson, 2015; Takala et al., 2015). However, there is a growing interest among some EC preservice teachers in Sweden to learn about special needs and inclusive practices, and this has led some to undertake additional subjects in the area during the teaching degree. In a study by Zakirova Engstrand and Roll-Petersson (2012) exploring Swedish EC/preschool teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion of children with autism into the mainstream preschool classroom indicated that the positive attitudes and high sense of self-efficacy among the preservice teachers related to the extra courses they had taken during the EC/ preschool teacher education program. Preservice teachers' who had not taken on extra studies in special needs education during their teacher education program, demonstrated a more 'neutral' attitude towards including children with autism in the mainstream preschool classroom.

Nel et al., (2011) compared teacher attitudes to the inclusion of children with special needs into mainstream classrooms between South African and Swedish teachers. Her findings showed that South African teachers like Swedish teachers were in favor of including students with special needs into the mainstream classroom. The concerns expressed by the South African teachers related to the implementation of inclusion policy, training and professional support for teachers (being a new initiative). The concerns expressed by the Swedish classroom teachers did not relate to implementation of inclusion policy but to an assumption that 'all' Swedish classroom teachers have the necessary skills and training to implement inclusive education. This concern is associated with the lack of qualified teaching staff and lack of professional development opportunities (Larsson et al., 2017). Teachers' with an undergraduate degree are eligible for postgraduate study after three years working as EC/Preschool teachers (Persson, 2015; Takala, Wickman, Uusitalo-Malmivaara, & Lundström, 2015).

### Developing Self-Efficacy

A positive attitude towards inclusion does not necessarily mean that the teacher has the necessary expertise to meet the needs of children with special needs. However, positive attitudes towards learning together with a belief in the value and rights of all children are important factors that enable teachers' a sense of confidence in their learning about inclusion that allow them to develop the necessary capabilities to support all children in their care. Bandura defined the concept of self-efficacy as teachers' "capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to [...] be successfully capable of teaching, regardless [of] surrounding conditions like SES, parental home or school climate" (Bandura, 1997, p. 3). In other words, self-efficacy relates to the teacher's personal beliefs about his or her own capabilities as a teacher. It is therefore the teacher's personal

belief, as to whether they are to be able to overcome the challenges involved knowing and learning about how to support the student with special needs. Many preservice teachers' have concerns about inclusion (Kuyini & Mangope, 2011; O'toole & Burke, 2013), and level of support to implement inclusive education practices (Shaukat, Sharma, & Furlonger, 2013). There has been substantial research focused on understanding how to support the development of self-efficacy among teachers (Fackler & Malmberg, 2016; Sharma, Shaukat, & Furlonger, 2015). It has been found that teachers with positive attitudes (Hastings & Oakford, 2003), have a higher degree of teaching efficacy to teach in inclusive classrooms (Gao & Mager, 2011), they have lower degree of concerns (Kuyini & Mangope, 2011; O'toole & Burke, 2013) and higher level of perceived support to teach in inclusive classrooms (Shaukat, Sharma, & Furlonger, 2013).

Research that have examined factors that clearly influence attitudes, efficacy and level of concerns finds two factors that appear to emerge frequently as significant and that influence all three variables across studies. These are participation in high quality inclusive teacher education programs and the opportunity to have close associations with people with a disability during the teacher education programs (Forlin & Chambers, 2011).

Self-efficacy or positive beliefs (Bandura, 1997) towards inclusion (Gao & Mager, 2011), a concern about inclusion (Kuyini & Mangope, 2011; O'toole & Burke, 2013), and an increased level of support to implement inclusive education practices (Shaukat, Sharma, & Furlonger, 2013) are some of the commonly investigated variables. It is generally found that teachers with positive attitudes (Hastings & Oakford, 2003), maintain a higher degree of teaching efficacy to teach in inclusive classrooms (Gao & Mager, 2011), experience a lower degree of concern (Kuyini & Mangope, 2011; O'toole & Burke, 2013), and enjoy a higher level of perceived support to teach in inclusive classrooms (Shaukat, Sharma, & Furlonger, 2013). Research that have examined factors that could influence attitudes, efficacy and levels of concerns, find two factors that seem to emerge frequently as significant and that could influence all three variables across studies. These are participation in high quality inclusive teacher education programs and the opportunity to have close associations with people with a disability during the teacher education programs (Forlin & Chambers, 2011).

In recent years several researchers have examined teachers' intention to teach in inclusive classrooms, as it is believed that intentions are better predictors of their behavior rather than their attitudes (Sharma, Shaukat, & Furlonger, 2015; Sharma, & Jacobs, 2016; Yan & Sin, 2015). According to the well cited Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), an individual's actual behavior could be predicted based on his or her intention to engage in the behavior. Intentions are influenced by the individ-

ual's attitudes towards the behavior, his or her perceived competence to enact the behavior, and subjective norm (or how others perceive the behavior). If a teacher has positive attitudes towards inclusion and has a higher degree of competence to include students with a range of abilities, and if they are teaching in a school where the rest of the school personnel support the idea of including students with diverse abilities, the teacher will have positive intentions to include students with diverse abilities. Ultimately then, a teacher with positive intentions is likely to include students with diverse abilities in their classrooms.

Swedish early childhood preservice teacher attitudes, efficacy and levels of concerns towards inclusion has been an unexplored area and hence the purpose of this study.

The specific aims of the study were to:

- (1) Examine if a cohort of Swedish final year pre-service early childhood teachers' intention to teach in inclusive classrooms could be predicted using a six-part questionnaire exploring preservice teacher attitudes, concerns, and self-efficacy,
- (2) Explore the effect of demographic variables that influenced participants' use of inclusive practices to teach in inclusive classrooms,
- (3) Explore variables that are likely to predict how likely Swedish early childhood teachers will use inclusive practices.

## METHOD

### Participants

The sample was made up of 99 Swedish final year early childhood preservice teachers and out of the 97 participants who provided details about their gender, a large majority of the participants ( $n=87$ ) were female (88%). Most participants were aged less than 30 years (80% or  $N=78$ ). Fourteen participants were above the age of 36 years. Information about the study was emailed to the final years' Swedish EC/Preschool pre-service teachers' by one of the researchers prior to the distribution of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was translated into Swedish with the support of a Special needs Course coordinator to ensure language compliance between the English and the Swedish version to ensure reliability of the measuring instrument. The impact of translation, the finer nuances of language and different educational and cultural structures were critical to consider in the translation.

Following the Swedish Research Council Ethical Guidelines (2011) to ensure confidentiality preservice teachers were advised both in writing via the information letter and verbally at the distribution of the questionnaire that they were not required to sign or provide their names, gender or age and that their participation was voluntary.



The researcher collected ninety-nine hard-copy questionnaires' where from two incomplete questionnaires were removed leaving 97 questionnaires for the analysis.

### Data Collection

The instrument used for data collection was a six-part questionnaire (Sharma & Desai 2002, Sharma, & Jacobs, 2016). Part 1 was entitled Attitudes towards Inclusion Scale (AIS) (Sharma, & Jacobs, 2016). The scale measures participants' feelings about how they feel about teaching in inclusive classrooms. The scale consisted of 10 themes written as statements, measured on a 7 point Likert scale (1= strongly disagree, 7= strongly agree). The scale was validated across two international contexts (India and Australia) and found to have sufficient reliability in both countries ( $\alpha > 0.74$ ). An example of the statement is: "I believe that all students regardless of their ability should be taught in regular classrooms".

Part 2 consisted of an Intention to Teach in Inclusive classrooms scale (ITICS) (Sharma, & Jacobs, 2016). This scale measured how likely a teacher will apply one of the most effective inclusive practice in their classrooms. The scale consisted of 7 items and again ranked on a 7-point Likert scale (1= extremely unlikely, 7= extremely likely). The ITICS was also validated in the same study (Sharma, & Jacobs, 2016) and found to have adequate reliability in both contexts ( $\alpha > 0.68$ ). An example of an item is "Change the curriculum to meet the learning needs of a student with learning difficulty enrolled in your class". The attitude and intention scales are significantly different in the sense that while the attitude scale measures participants' feelings, the intention scale measures how likely they are to enact the practice of implementing inclusive education.

Part three of the questionnaire consisted of the Teacher Efficacy for Inclusive Practices (Sharma, & Jacobs, 2016; Sharma, Loreman, & Forlin, 2012). The scale reliability for the total scale in the original study was 0.89 (Sharma, & Jacobs, 2016). The scale consists of 18 items measured on a 6 point Likert scale (1= strongly disagree and 6 = strongly agree). An example of an item is "I am able to provide an alternate explanation or, example when students are confused". The scale consists of efficacy in inclusive instruction, efficacy in managing behavior and efficacy in collaboration. Part four of the questionnaire measured participants' level of concerns about implementing inclusive education using Concerns about Inclusive Education Scale (CIES) (Sharma & Desai 2002). The scale is also frequently used by researchers worldwide and reveals reliable scores ( $\alpha > 0.85$ ) (Sharma & Desai 2002). The scale consists of 21 items and uses four point Likert type rating of Not at all concerned (1) to Extremely concerned (4). An example of the item from the scale reads; "My workload will increase".

Part five of the questionnaire consisted of Inclusive Practices Scale (IPS) and was to measure the use of inclusive teaching practices. The scale consists of 26 items, which measured using a four point Likert type responses ranging from Novice (1), Developing (2), Proficient (3) to Expert (4). Each participant was asked to rate the frequency with which he or she used a specific teaching behavior. An example of an item is "In my class, I relate learning activities to students' personal and family experiences". Reliability of all four parts of the questionnaire was tested for the Swedish sample. Part six of the questionnaire consisted of demographic information (age, gender, qualification) from the pre-service teachers.

### Data Analysis

The data from the self-reporting questionnaires were transferred and analyzed using IBM SPSS version 25. The statistical analysis consisted of descriptive statistics (means, modes, upper and lower scores), regression analysis and additional analysis to determine how likely teachers were to use inclusive practices. Considering the data were collected from a small sample of teachers. Hence caution, should be taken when interpreting the findings. All participants self-reported about their intention, efficacy and use of inclusive practices. One also needs to be careful when interpreting the results as often when self-reporting the data participants tend to be positive about their self-reported practices. In order to reduce the negative effect of self-reporting, we used anonymous surveys. Although anonymous surveys do not completely wipe out the negative effect of self-reporting, it does reduce the chances of participants overestimating their scores.

## RESULTS

Prior to analyzing the data for each of the three research aims, we calculated reliability of each scale using Cronbach alphas. The analysis revealed that all scales had adequate reliabilities (AIS=0.75; ITICS= 0.82; CIES= 0.86; TEIP=0.88 and IPS (0.92).

### Summary of mean scores for attitude, intention, concern teaching efficacy and inclusive practices

Participants mean scores for attitude, intention, concern teaching efficacy and inclusive practices were 2.91, 6.47, 6.48, 1.92, and 4.51 respectively (see Table 1). The mean attitude and intention scores between 6 and 7 suggest that participants were in favor of including students with diverse learning needs. Participants mean concern scores close to 2 (a little concerned) are suggestive that they had minor degree of concerns about teaching inclusive classrooms. Mean teaching efficacy scores of 4.5 suggested that participants had high degree of teaching efficacy to teach in inclusive classrooms but there was some room for improvement on this construct. Participants'

mean inclusive practice score of 2.88 suggested that participants were already using inclusive practices relatively frequently (2= Developing, 3= Proficient). The mean score also suggested that there was a long way to go before the participants could call themselves as Expert (4) implementers of inclusive practices.

### Predictors of intention to teach in inclusive classrooms

A linear regression was conducted to determine if three independent variables of attitude, concern and teaching efficacy scores predicted participants' intention to teach in inclusive classrooms. A significant model emerged  $F(3, 94) = 6.121, p = .001$ , which accounted for 14% (adjusted  $R^2$ ) of the variance in participants' intention scores. In the final analysis as seen in Table 1, attitudes towards inclusion ( $\beta = .232, p = .05$ ) and teaching efficacy scores ( $\beta = .219, p < .05$ ) emerged as significant predictors of the intention scores.

### Factors influencing use of inclusive practices

We were also interested in determining if any of the background variables influenced use of inclusive practices. Four variables (age, gender, level of knowledge of local legislation, level of training in special education) were used as independent variables to determine their influence on use of inclusive practices. As shown in Table 3, a significant model emerged  $F(4, 87) = 2.80, p = .031$ , which accounted for 7.3% (adjusted  $R^2$ ) of the variance in participants' use of inclusive practices. Only one variable, knowledge of local legislation relating to education of students with disabilities, emerged as the significant predictor of the participants' use of inclusive practices. It suggested that participants who had better understanding of local legislation were more likely to use inclusive practices in their classrooms ( $\beta = .252, p = .015$ ).

### Predictors of use of inclusive practices in Swedish classrooms

Four independent variables (attitude, concerns, intentions and teaching efficacy) were used to predict use of inclusive practices. As Table 4 shows a significant model emerged  $F(4, 93) = 12.491, p < .001$ , that accounted for 32.2% (adjusted  $R^2$ ) of the variance in the use of inclusive practices. Three variables emerged as significant predictors. Mean teaching efficacy scores ( $\beta = .551, p < .001$ ) was the strongest predictor of the three. The other two variables were attitudes towards inclusion ( $\beta = .223, p = .015$ ) and intention to teach in inclusive classrooms ( $\beta = -.0205, p = .027$ ). It suggested that participants who had better understanding of local legislation were more likely to use inclusive practices in their classrooms ( $\beta = .252, p = .015$ ).

Table 1

*Summary of Descriptive Statistics of Inclusive practices, Attitudes, Intention, Concern, Teaching Efficacy*

	Mean	Std Deviation	N
Mean Inclusive Practices	2.9154	.41807	98
Attitude Means	6.4723	.57078	98
Mean Intention	6.4865	.53638	98
Mean Concern	1.9274	.039768	98
Mean Teaching Efficacy	4.5192	.59267	98

## DISCUSSION

To date, very few studies have explored the beliefs and attitudes of Swedish EC pre-service teachers towards inclusion. This study helps to fill this void by providing a snapshot of EC preservice teachers at one Swedish university. In this study, the attitudes and self-efficacy towards inclusion based on the EC preservice teacher responses to the self-reporting questionnaire have been very positive. The suggestions for why this might have occurred relate to as responses indicated that these EC preservice have a comprehensive understanding of the Swedish legislation regarding inclusion of children with special needs in preschools. To these EC preservice teachers' inclusive education is another way of referring to 'a school for all' reflected in Swedish national and educational policies (Berhanu, 2011; Gerrbo, 2012; Persson, 2015). This strong foundational belief embedded in Swedish policies and legislation translated and based on the cultural context may provide some explanation for the positive beliefs and attitudes shown by the EC preservice teachers in the survey.

Secondly, preservice teachers have absorbed the collective belief and values from society that has accumulated into inclusion being a part of being Swedish (Takkala et al., 2015; WHO, 2007). Importantly, the personal experiences of inclusion that these preservice teachers have experienced began in pre-school (ages 1-5), followed by preschool class (age 6) compulsory schooling (aged 7- 16) and secondary school (ages 16-19 years). During this time the preservice teachers would have seen and experienced inclusive practices and have personal experiences of interacting with students of diverse abilities. It means that before preservice teachers enter higher education, they would have had at least 18 years of personal experience related to inclusion. The concept of 'apprenticeship by observation' (Lortie, 1975) may provide some explanation for preservice teachers' high self-efficacy. Observation and mastery of experience are important contributors to the development of self-efficacy. We can suggest that observation and personal experience during schooling experiences may have contributed to strong teacher self-efficacy. During teacher education, EC preservice teachers may have also

Table 2

*Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis for Intention to Teach in Inclusive Classrooms*

Source	B	SE B	$\beta$	t	p
Attitudes	0.218	0.092	0.232	2.356	0.021
Concerns	-0.194	0.134	-0.144	-1.449	0.151
Teaching Efficacy	0.198	0.087	0.219	2.276	0.025
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> = 14%					

observed positive inclusive practices demonstrated by the teacher educators and tried some of these out during their 30 days of professional experience in preschools. The EC preservice teachers may have also discussed positive inclusive practices with their supervising teachers, leading to a sense of strong self-efficacy.

A third explanation for the positive responses towards inclusion relate to the way inclusive practices are embedded and infused across all subjects over the three and a half years teacher education program by highly qualified EC teaching staff. There is the possibility that this way of organizing teacher education programs leads to enhanced beliefs and attitudes toward inclusion among preservice teachers and inclusion becomes ones responsibility rather than the responsibility of teacher educators. Preservice teachers may also experience inclusive practices during their professional experience and are able to reflect on these in collaboration with their supervising teacher, other preservice teachers and university staff.

The approach taken in Swedish EC teacher education programs to embed or infuse inclusive education across all subject provides a holistic understanding of inclusion. While some countries would have specific subjects focused on inclusive education during a teacher education program with specific content focused on inclusion, in Sweden inclusion is fundamental to the entire program. This idea of 'a school for all' has resulted from the implementation of legislation from the 1960s that continues to influence and

Table 3

*Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis for Use of Inclusive Practices from Background Variables*

Source	B	SE B	$\beta$	t	p
Knowledge of local legislation	0.12	0.048	0.252	2.47	0.015
Age	0.05	0.034	0.160	1.56	0.12
Gender	0.21	0.146	0.147	1.42	0.16
Level of Training in special education	0.010	0.072	0.015	0.145	0.885
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> = 7.3%					

Table 4

*Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis for Use of Inclusive Practices Based on their Attitude, Efficacy, Concern and Intention Scores*

Source	B	SE B	$\beta$	t	p
Attitudes	0.163	.066	0.223	2.48	0.015
Concerns	-0.55	0.094	-0.052	-0.585	0.560
Intention	-0.160	0.071	-0.205	-2.245	0.027
Teaching Efficacy	0.389	0.062	0.551	6.298	0.000

Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> = 32.2%

form the Swedish society even with the current challenges. All Swedish pre-service teachers are aware of the legislation of 'a school for all', and have personal experiences throughout their own educational experiences. The immediate concerns facing Sweden relate to the current and acute lack of qualified teaching personnel especially in early childhood and may suggest that, "the face of inclusive education is slowly changing in Sweden as there is some uncertainty about whether teachers' attitudes to inclusive education will remain positive" (Jerlinder, Danermark, & Gill, 2010, pp. 52-53). The number of educational reforms has resulted in the introduction of public management ideals around schooling with a stronger focus on grades and school improvement. Within Sweden there has also been a growth in the private school sector (for both preschools and schools) leading to changing expectations about the role of school. The public management agenda has slowly started to shift parental beliefs about school choice based on quality, interactions and behavior.

Findings show the importance of positive teacher education programs around inclusive practice to foster strong attitudes and beliefs towards inclusion. The embedding of inclusion across Swedish teacher education could be one reason why the surveyed teachers had such strong attitudes and efficacy as they would have encountered inclusion in every course. This may suggest that for inclusive practices to be supported and understood by pre-service teachers, it may be beneficial if teacher education programs have inclusion embedded throughout. Rather than students studying inclusion in stand-alone subjects, it may be more useful for students to learn inclusive practices across the different areas they study including learning areas, the curriculum, play and teaching.

The study also highlights how EC teacher education can perhaps contribute to greater inclusive practices in the actual classroom. Given that the majority of the pre-service teachers had positive beliefs and attitudes, it can be argued that classroom practices will be directly influenced leading to stronger inclusion. The positive beliefs were created from a strong understanding of the local context and legislation around inclusion. If the beliefs and attitudes are established

and resistant to change, they may well develop into a philosophical underpinning for the EC teachers. When they do encounter situations that require inclusive practices, the teachers' positive feelings may contribute to strong support for implementing inclusive practices.

One point for consideration is the future challenges in Swedish early childhood teacher education. In recent years there has been an influx of immigrant and refugee families with children. This has created a greater need for individual courses in special needs that especially support children from a non-Swedish background who may have behavioral and emotional needs. In some Swedish pre-schools the majority of parents are from a non-Swedish background and as such it is important that teacher education programs are able to respond to the changing needs for inclusive practices. It is unclear if the current teacher education program is able to fulfil this need.

### Limitations of the Study

This study has number of limitations that should be taken into consideration the data is self-report data, which means that the actual attitudes, concerns and efficacy cannot be confirmed in action through other data collection methods such as observations. Secondly, the tool was translated into Swedish and there may have been small differences in the interpretation based on cultural and contextual differences. Finally, the study collected data once during the final year of pre-service early childhood teachers. The attitudes, concerns and efficacy of the students may have changed before they entered the actual classroom and began teaching.

### CONCLUSION

This study has reported on the attitudes, concerns and efficacy of ninety-seven (n=97) Swedish final year pre-service early childhood teachers. Attitudes, efficacy and intentions emerged as significant predictors of how likely the early childhood teachers would report using inclusive practices in the future. The positive results from this study provides a small sample of final year EC preservice teacher beliefs and attitudes in Sweden and as such cannot be generalized to all final year EC preservice teachers from other Swedish universities. Variation may occur across the different training institutions that have different compositions of courses and content with each Swedish higher education institute able to implement their own program for EC preservice teachers. Future Swedish EC/Preschool teachers would no doubt benefit from additional courses in special needs pedagogy and inclusive practices to continue supporting positive attitudes, self-efficacy and intentions that are paramount to ensure the continuity of the Swedish model of inclusion 'a school for all'.

The key findings of this study suggests that preservice teachers' strong self-efficacy beliefs about inclusion leads to

positive attitudes and intentions to use inclusive practices in their future teaching. Authentic and inclusive learning experiences during teacher education programs and taught by excellent teacher educators is one way to support preservice teacher confidence building to include all children in the learning journey.

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