Why use board games in leisure-time centres? Prominent staff discourses and described subject positions when playing with children

Björn Haglund & Louise Peterson

Abstract: Board games are traditionally seen as an important Swedish leisure-time centre activity, but research regarding this activity is sparse. This study aims to fill part of that void through a web survey directed to members in a closed Facebook group focusing on leisure-time centres. Fifty-five informants' answers were analysed using critical discourse analysis to find why staff at leisure-time centres use board games. The article also discusses the subject positions the staff use when playing board games with the children. The results reveal four prominent discourses, which were termed: supporting social structure, learning social competence, substituting digital games, and learning cognitive abilities. The results also reveal three subject positions while playing board games: developer, supervising judge, and participant. The informants' discourses regarding their reasons for using board games and the positions the staff settled into while playing board games drew mostly from a social pedagogical arena. However, features that emphasize traditional school related content are also evident.

Keywords: board games, leisure-time centres, critical discourse analysis, subject positions, teachers

Introduction

Research that focuses on Swedish leisure-time centres is sparse despite apparent governmental ambitions to stress these institutions importance through the production of new steering documents.[1] It is therefore important to deepen our knowledge concerning everyday practice in leisure-time centres and study how and in what way the activities used stimulate children's learning and offer meaningful leisure and recreation. This article focuses on the use of board games (i.e., different stimulating card games and parlour games directed to younger school children) within the practices of Swedish leisure-time centres. However, before discussing play and its connection to board games more thoroughly, it is necessary to

---

1   For some time, these institutions have been referred to as "leisure-time centres", but in the official English translation of the latest Swedish curriculum (Lgr11), these institutions are called "recreational centres". Swedish researchers have in recent years called these institutions school-age educare centres as a way to emphasize that they comprise both education and care.

first describe leisure-time centres and the everyday activities that take place in these institutions.

Leisure-time centres are institutions that provide pedagogical activities for children between 6 and 12 years of age before and after school. According to statistical data from the Swedish National Agency for Education (2016), more than 400,000 children (about 85% of all six- to eight-year-old Swedish children) participate in these activities. The cultural traditions are to a great extent based on pre-school and its connections to Fröbel and progressive ideas influenced by Dewey (Pihlgren & Rohlin, 2011). According to Ursberg (1996), Swedish leisure-time centres should be seen as grounded in a common Nordic child-minding culture that focuses on care, nurture, and children's personal development.[2] Saar, Löfdahl, and Hjalmarsson (2012) argued that these activities traditionally include pottery, sports activities, play, bakery, and games. The importance of playful activities is evident in earlier research concerning leisure-time centres, but the use of board games has not been the main focus in these studies. Svensson (1981), for example, asserted that the most common activities are to play games of different kinds, to puzzle, draw, paint and to potter. Johansson (1984) also affirmed that these-as well as free play, circle time, sports, and snack time-are important activities.

During the last 20 years, the government has, through the creation and distribution of new steering documents, initiated a transition of focus concerning leisure-time centres. This transition has resulted in a change from a social pedagogical arena, where the staff at leisure-time centres prioritize cooperation with the children's parents, to an arena emphasizing education and cooperation with schools (cf. Andersson, 2013; Haglund, 2015; Rohlin, 2001). Although more recent steering documents (The Education Act, 2010; The National Agency for Education, 2011, 2014) treat the leisure-time centre as an educational institution, play still has an important role, which is also indicated in the general recommendations. "The pupils could amongst other things cultivate impressions, develop fantasy and creativity and develop their skills in cooperation and communication. Play also give the pupils opportunities to practise turn taking, consent, concentration and endurance" (The National Agency for Education, 2014, p. 34).

Since the focus of leisure-time centres, amongst other things, are to support social, emotional and academic development in a structured way they are embodied by the term extended education. This study is based on a web survey and should be seen as a pilot study focusing on board games as one aspect of the content and framing of activities in leisure-time centres. The study is a starting point for more extensive studies concerning leisure-time centre activities in general and playing board games within this context in particular. This is of relevance since a deeper knowledge regarding the use of board games could be a way to offer meaningful leisure and recreation and to stimulate learning through a carefully prepared everyday practice at the leisure-time centre. The aim of this article is to (a) discuss

---

2   After-school services exist in other countries in addition to Nordic countries. For more detailed information concerning these institutions and their somewhat different purposes and activities see, for example, Pálsdóttir (2012) concerning the Nordic countries; Vandell, Pierce, and Dadisman (2005) and Shernoff and Vandell (2007) pertaining to after-school programs in the US; and Stecher and Maschke (2013) and Fischer and Klieme (2013) regarding all-day schools in Germany. Australian outside-school-hours care is described and studied by Cartmel (2007).

prominent discourses to find why staff at leisure-time centres use board games and to (b) discuss what identities or subject positions they use when playing board games with children.

Perspectives on play and different uses of board games

Children's play and games

In the *Encyclopaedia of Play in Today's Society* (Carlisle, 2009), it is argued that both children and adults spend a great deal of time in activities that are labelled as play. Play is seen as fun and entertaining and includes various kinds of games, sports, and hobbies. Carlisle (2009) asserted that children and adults participate in different play activities for many reasons and that play could have many functions such as entertainment, learning skills (e.g., accepting defeat), following rules, and exercising leadership. It is also suggested that games and toys may also assist the development of various intellectual skills "such as reading, arithmetic, and even gaining knowledge of such subjects as physics, geography, and history" (p. x). The belief that play fosters learning during children's development is not new: "Most traditional theoretical and empirical work on children's play and games has focused on the contributions of these activities for children's development of cognitive and communicative skills and their acquisition of social knowledge" (Evaldsson & Corsaro, 1998, p. 377). Evaldsson and Aarsand (2011, p. 137) suggested that research on children's play can be divided into two strands. The first is research that considers play (and games) as a means for learning. The focus is on what formal knowledge children learn and how they learn it. This research design takes an adult perspective on play. The second is research that regards children's play and games as valuable in its own right. Here, the analytical focus is on how children play and aims to take children's perspectives on play.

Research has also shown that play is an elusive term. There is no consensus on how play should be defined. Playing games often includes a variety of activities. As mentioned earlier, previous research has shown that board games are often positioned as one play activity among others in leisure-time centres. Subsequent studies have also treated the use of board games in a synoptic way while other issues are highlighted. Kane, Ljusberg, and Larsson (2013), Kane and Petrie (2015), Lager (2016), and Haglund (2015) discussed different aspects of play and tried to describe the complexity of giving space to play in everyday practice. Although "[b]oard games are seen as pedagogical devices" (Haglund, 2015, p. 223), research addressing board games is "extremely sparse" in after-school contexts (Shernoff & Vandell, 2007, p. 4). A study by Harvard Maare (2015), however, focuses on children's use of board games at a leisure-time centre. She argues that the design of learning activities implies that the participants have the right to choose whether they want to participate. For that reason, she asserted that it is important to regard board games from the perspective of learners and use the concepts *learnable* and *learnworthy* as a way to come closer to a child's perspective. These concepts are directed towards the child's perception of whether the game can be learnt and if it is seen as enriching with respect to reciprocity, mastery, and the potential for closure.

As Linderoth (2014) suggests, for a teacher interested in using games in a pedagogical setting, it is also important to understand how games and play works. Empirical work on teachers' perceptions of using games for learning are rare. Four hundred and seventy-nine teachers in schools in Singapore (primary, secondary, and junior colleges) participated in a survey study focusing on teachers' perceptions of game related learning. The results show that the majority of participating teachers were positive towards and used games in their classrooms, although not frequently. Board games, card games, and word-hunt games were the most common game types used (26%) by the teachers. It is concluded that teachers' personal interests and a "gaming mind-set" are seen as pull factors that influence game adoption and use (Koh et al., 2012, p. 57).

Studies on games and learning

As suggested by Mosely and Whitton, "[g]ames are enjoying something of a golden period at the current time" (2014, p. 1). It also appears that there is a revived interest in how games can be used for educational purposes in different educational settings. This is particularly evidenced by the rapidly growing academic field termed *Games Studies*, which produces a great deal of research literature. However, much of the research literature expresses an interest in digital games (e.g., computer games, online games, mobile games, and console games). Instead of making a division between digital and non-digital games, Linderoth (2011) suggests that it might be more fruitful to look at the family resemblance of games. Digital technology is not a condition for approaching game-based learning (Linderoth, 2014; Sharp, 2011). This requires the attention of scholars who are interested in game mechanics. Furthermore, games are complex artefacts, and Linderoth argues that it is important to distinguish between two elements of a game: the rules of the game and the theme of the game. The theme of the game may have pleasant features for a specific player, but it is often subordinated (Linderoth, 2014). Thus, playing a game is interacting with the game mechanics (i.e., the rules of the game). According to Mosely and Whitton (2014), the procedures and rules of a game also distinguish between a good game and a bad game. In their book *New traditional games for learning* (Mosely & Whitton, 2014), the authors present a set of cases accompanied by ideas about how to design games using more traditional methods. Much of the empirical research conducted with regard to children, board games, and learning has paid attention to how board games can foster different cognitive, social, and communication skills.

Board games are studied in disciplines such as history, the social sciences, mathematics, philosophy, psychology, and particularly in formal sciences such as mathematics. Goobet et al. suggests that they have become a favoured subject "due to their well-specified rules" (2004, p. 6). This is also reflected in studies that take an interest in children who are playing board games so as to learn. Much of the empirical research that has been conducted focuses on finding out how board games can promote arithmetical understanding. Studies have shown that playing linear board games improves children's numerical knowledge (Siegler & Ramani, 2009) and improves children's numerical estimation skills and number comprehension (Whyte & Bull, 2008). Linear board games also strengthen children's early arithmetic skills, which was not the case when playing circular board games (Elofsson, Gustafson, Samuelsson, & Träff, 2016). These studies show that it is important to distin-

guish between the types of games that are used in research when investigating the potential of learning by playing games (i.e., it is important to take the game mechanics into consideration).

Some empirical research has taken an interest in how games might benefit from the development of emotional and social skills. For example, based on a review of the theoretical and practical literature, Hromek and Roffey (2009) argued that games are powerful tools for children to develop social and emotional skills.

> Every face-to-face game, no matter the objective, provides a 'social experiment' in which players must use self-regulation and social skill to play successfully with others. The complexity of games played by young children varies from turn-taking games, such as tag, to more complex games where players require a fair degree of social and cognitive sophistication to play /…/ (Hromek & Roffey, 2009, p. 631pp).

Research grounded in psychotherapy has also been interested in the use of board games. For example, Oren (2008) suggested how board games can be used by therapists to evaluate a child's emotional development. Other studies have payed attention to how different game mechanics influence social behaviour. As an example, Bay-Hinitz, Peterson, and Quilitch (1994) examined the effects of playing cooperative and competitive games. Seventy preschool children between four and five years of age participated in the experimental study. The results showed that cooperative board games increased cooperative behaviour and decreased aggressive behaviour in young children.

Theory

The theoretical point of departure emanates from critical discourse analysis (CDA), which focuses on how our language, in the form of discourses, contributes to the constitution of the world. Fairclough (2003) claims that a discourse, used as a general notion, should be seen as an element of social life that is dialectically related to other elements. More specifically, "different discourses are different ways of representing aspects of the world" (p. 215), and these discourses are often competing since different people have different ways of representing the world. Fairclough (2010) described these often competing discourses as the order of discourse:

> An order of discourse is a social structuring of semiotic difference - a particular social ordering of relationships among different ways of making meaning […]. One aspect of this ordering is dominance: some ways of making meaning are dominant or mainstream in a particular order of discourse, others are marginal or oppositional, or 'alternative'. (p. 265)

The order of discourse should, therefore, be seen as the totality of the different discursive practices and the relationships between them. This means that, in this study, it will be important to discuss the existing prominent discourses in the empirical material concerning why staff at leisure-time centres use board games and the relationships between these discourses.

Fairclough asserted that text analysis is an important part of discourse analysis, but he also stressed that the language in these texts are an irreducible part of social life. Fairclough (1992, 2010) therefore stressed that CDA uses a three-dimensional framework of analysis regarding what he labelled as discursive events: text, discourse practice, and social practice.

Text includes pictures and language, both written and spoken, and focuses on the analysis of linguistic structure.

Discursive practice contributes to "reproducing society (social identities, social relationships, systems of knowledge and belief) as it is, yet also contributes to transforming society" (Fairclough, 1992, p. 65). Discursive practice studies how people produce and interpret texts—for example, how staff members at leisure-time centres debate about and interpret their responsibilities and policy documents that describe their work. Discourse as social practice is the effort made by people when they interact with each other and the surrounding world. Fairclough and Wodak (1997) asserted that discourse as social practice implies a dialectical relationship between particular discursive events and those situations, institutions, and social structures that frame them. This dialectical relationship means that social practice is shaped by situations, institutions, and social structures while at the same time, these situations, institutions, and social structures are also shaped by social practice itself.[3] As this is a dialectic process, this also means that the social practices we engage in and the efforts we make in connection with them, contribute to the construction of our identities and positions—in the same way that people's identities and performed efforts contribute to the construction of social practices. Fairclough (2010) argued that "positions within practices are pre-given 'slots' in which people have to act, and the position-practice system has a relative durability over time" (p. 176).[4] However, Fairclough (2003, 2010) also pointed out that texts and discourses used in one social practice are sometimes relocated and in this way recontextualised in another social practice. This means that that the position-practice system is open to changes since "recontextualising of meanings is also transformations of meanings, through decontextualisation (taking meanings out of their contexts) and recontextualising (putting meanings in new contexts)" (2010, p. 76).

Methodology and analysis

Data was collected through a web survey directed at members of a closed thematic Facebook group focusing on work at leisure-time centres and the professional role of leisure-time pedagogues. The reason for this was to gain access to potential research participants working in leisure-time centres from a wide geographical area in Sweden. The survey information contained a general description of the aims and objectives of the study, which was initially based on a student teacher idea where the intention was to write an examina-

---

3   This corresponds with Anthony Giddens theory of structuration (1979, 1984). Giddens (1979) asserted that an activity is both a consequence of and a medium for the social practice that the actors participate in. When actors produce and reproduce virtual structures, they are also recreating the conditions concerning the specific social practice in which they are engaged.

4   This corresponds with both Hall (1997) and Giddens (1979). Hall asserted that group members adopt specific subject positions within a certain discourse. They settle into the subject position that the discourse offers regarding that particular subject position. Giddens claims that a social position can be described as a power position that offers different privileges and obligations.

tion paper regarding children´s development and analogue games.[5] Analogue games were considered as games that did not require digital technology such as card games, board games, and parlour games. These various kinds of analogue games are all labelled board games in this article.

The intention of the study was to reach many participants with the help of a questionnaire. An online survey was seen as a faster way of collecting data compared to other survey methods and was also considered as giving opportunities to collect answers from across Sweden. The questionnaire was available online from April 8th to April 18th, 2014. Sixty-six members of the Facebook group participated in the inquiry, 55 of whom completed the survey. The answers showed that the majority of the informants who completed the survey (37) were leisure-time pedagogues, seven classified themselves as leisure-time centre teachers, and the remaining eleven had various qualifications such as child minders, teachers, recreation leaders, and one had a qualification as an assistant nurse. The web survey was, however, only online for eleven days, and many of the 2,000 website participants probably did not notice the survey. However, as already mentioned, the Facebook group was only used to gain access to potential research participants, and our aim was not to generalize the results through a large representative sample. We consider the result from this pilot study to be valuable in that the study initiates research in an area that lacks thorough discussion.

The questionnaire included both closed-ended questions, which were followed up with contingency questions, and open-ended questions. The questionnaire began with three questions that asked participants to specify their professional training, the county where they work, and what kind of activity they worked in. The subsequent questions included three closed-ended questions, which were followed up with contingency questions, and seven open-ended questions. The questionnaire concluded by asking the participants if they wanted to be informed of the results. All survey answers were recorded in an Excel file—the questions were placed in columns, and the participants' answers were located below each question. In this way, it was possible to get an overview of the answers and to investigate the number of drop-outs (i.e., participants who had not completed the questionnaire). The following questions were seen as the most relevant to the study's research questions: (1) What analogue games do the children have the opportunity to play, and why did you choose these particular games? (2) What is your attitude to analogue board games? (3) How do you understand the children's game activities? Motivate your answer. (4) Do you play together with the children? If yes, what role do you adopt?

According to Fairclough (1992), there is no rigid CDA manual for conducting the analysis of empirical material. Three dimensions—text, discursive practice, and social practice—will overlap during the analysis process, which according to Fairclough involves the progression from interpretation to description and back to interpretation. The analysis in this study began by repeatedly reading the informants' responses to the questionnaire. This entailed looking for prominent discourses (i.e., the staff's different and repeatedly formulated ways of representing the board games' function in the activity). The analysis contin-

---

5   The two students, Richard Gustafsson and Kristina Köröndi, abandoned their initial idea and changed the subject for their examination paper after the data was gathered. We are grateful for their approval in letting us use the gathered data.

ued by describing the order of discourse and the relationships between the different discourses (i.e., how the texts were constituted and articulated together) (cf. Fairclough, 2010). These descriptions were a means for finding and describing the activity's essential conditions, with the help of Fairclough's notion of intertextuality, and thereby explain "why the discourse practice is as it is; and the effects of the discourse practice upon the social practice" (Fairclough, 1992, p. 237).[6] Fairclough (1992, 2010) describes intertextuality as "What is said and done and written in a particular event or text is intertextually related to other events and texts: people inevitably draw on, anticipate, and respond to other events and other texts" (2010, p. 420–421).

The analysis of the linguistic content aimed to support and give a richer understanding of discursive practice, the discourses described, and social practice. The text analysis aimed to discuss both linguistic structure and intertextuality in the empirical material. The latter discussion intended to make contingent relations to other texts and events visible. It appeared that the answers were often rather short—approximately one to eight sentences. For this reason, the studies of the linguistic content were confined to looking for and analysing two grammatical elements: modality and transivity. The analysis of modality depicts the level of affinity people have with different propositions. In this study, a participant could assert, for example, that "board games are very important and must be a part of the activity". The words "very" and "must" indicate the importance the participant places upon this activity. The sentence "board games could be an important part of the activity" shows a lower affinity (see also Fairclough, 1992).

The analysis discusses the staff´s descriptions of their social identity or subject position when playing board games with the children. In addition to describing the relation between discursive practice and social practice, the analysis concerning this issue also focused on the power relations between staff and children when playing board games and the specific subject positions the staff settled into. This involves the second grammatical element—transivity—which "deals with the types of process which are coded in clauses, and the types of participant involved in them" (Fairclough, 1992, p. 178). This includes two processes, a relational process "where the verb marks a relationship (being, having, becoming, etc.) between participants, and 'action' processes, where an agent acts upon a goal" (Fairclough, 1992, p. 178). Thus, the analysis also focused on discussing the relation between discursive practice and social practice. Both the internal validity and the credibility are estimated to be high since we operationalized the relevant concepts and the theoretical framework. The research process has been transparently described and the aim and research questions have been answered.

Results

The results will first describe and discuss staff discourses in relation to board games in leisure-time centres. The subject positions that the staff acquire when playing board games with children will then be described and discussed.

---

6   This should be seen as a way to discuss the social system and whether existing norms are reproduced or transformed (see also Giddens, 1984).

Discourses regarding the reasons for using board games

Four prominent discourses were distinguished: supporting the social structure, learning social competence, substituting digital games, and learning cognitive abilities. These discourses are described here as separate but were most often articulated together in a more entangled way, which will be discussed in the concluding discussion.

Supporting social structure

The Supporting social structure discourse focuses on the use of board games as an activity that is integrated into the everyday work at the leisure-time centre.

> 12087784: We have gambling-dens as an activity at the leisure-time centre resulting in that children learn to play the games and because of that can choose to play board games during free play. You can ask if someone want to play because it was fun.

This excerpt describes the use of board games in two ways—the informant uses board games as a structured (i.e., staff directed, repeated activity) and as a child directed activity during their free play. The children learn the rules of the games during the structured activity and may, based on their positive experiences of learning how to play the games, play it again with other children during their free play. The excerpt indicates that board games are used in a carefully prepared way. It also indicates that the use of board games can develop positive relations between the children when they play. Such positive relations and the promotion of fellowship are also highlighted in the following excerpt.

> 12047521: I like to play and introduce the children to the board games. It´s a good way to make the children to get to know each other and start talking to more children than their regular friends.

Introducing children to board games was seen as a good way (positive affinity) to help them become acquainted with one another. The staff used board games as a device to support interactions between children who did not previously play together. This informant is consciously encouraging children's relation work (cf. Bliding, 2004) and their interaction (cf. Dahl, 2014), which supports the social order of the leisure-time centres (cf. Ursberg, 1996). The informants personal interest in playing board games also becomes a pull factor that influences game adoption (cf. Koh et al., 2012). The next excerpt emphasizes a preference for games that are not time-consuming and do not require factual knowledge.

> 12087784: We want games that don´t take such a long time to play…That makes more children want to participate…A game goes rather fast and you can play many times if it is fun! We prefer games that don´t require [factual] 'knowledge' like TP (Trivial Pursuit), it can get incredibly uneven in a group of children…Smartness and problem-solving abilities are promoted.

Games that are completed quickly are preferred because this provides the opportunity to play many times and to involve more children in what is considered as a fun activity. The words "many" and "more" indicate a positive affinity for both involving many children and providing the opportunity to play several times, and this should be seen as a way to offer a fun activity that contributes to maintaining fellowship and a positive everyday experience in the leisure-time centre. The informant also argued, with a strong negative affinity, *incredibly uneven*, that the games played should not involve factual knowledge since some

children's lack of knowledge would be made visible, which is not in line with the agenda of this leisure-time centre.

The next excerpt also highlights how board games are used as a device for developing social structure and easing everyday work at the leisure-time centre.

> 12065377: They gather around a common activity where the rules are settled. You don´t have to put time and effort to construct 'the game' by yourself. This can be nice after a tough day in school. The children think that some games are fun.

The informant's account indicates that children's use of board games is seen as a way to avoid planning structured activities after working in school while offering an activity that is self-directed in some respects and meets the children's need for recreation. The "tough day" in school appears to reflect the division between the work at school during the school day and the work at the leisure-time centre after school (cf. Andersson, 2013). Board games seem to be used as a part of the children's free play (Haglund, 2015)—activities that are not planned and structured by the staff—and is emphasized here as a device to ease the staff's work load. The concluding excerpt not only emphasizes board games as a structuring device for keeping children occupied but also as a device for changing the direction of their activities.

> 12092186: I have no particular opinion concerning the children´s playing. /…/ They pick up the games by themselves, some of the adults suggest it when they are bored or when they just run about.

As the informant does not have any particular opinion concerning board games, it appears that the use of board games within the activity is not greatly appreciated. The children are encouraged to play if they are bored or if they act in a disruptive way, but the account does not depict playing board games as an activity with a relevance beyond that.

Learning social competence

Many of the participants asserted that board games facilitate social competence.

> 12040585: A natural part of the activities that exercises many abilities. To follow rules, turn taking, chat, co-operate for example.

Board games are depicted as developing several competences but also as a natural part of the activities. This can be interpreted as meaning that board games are a natural part of leisure-time centre activities simply because board games, in themselves, are devices that are used to support social competence. The development of children's social competence has also, by tradition, been emphasized in leisure-time centre activities (cf. Haglund, 2015; Saar, Löfdahl, & Hjalmarsson, 2012). The abilities that are mentioned in the excerpt—to follow rules and take turns—are social competences that are useful in various contexts where interaction with other people is required. The informant is neutral regarding board games as no intensifying words are used. The informant in the following excerpt, however, emphasized social learning more explicitly.

> 12048851: It is fun and rewarding to play. A social activity. It is a very good social training for many [children]. It is always okay. /…/ Besides that, they, with the help of games, are practicing various skills. They are above all training turn taking and cooperation. They practice to become good losers and good winners.

Several social abilities that games may support are mentioned and, similar to the previous excerpt, turn taking and cooperation are mentioned. Moreover, board games are described as a fun and social activity that is appreciated by the informant. This indicates that playing board games is not entirely a matter of training social competence, but also a way to have fun at the same time. The use of board games is described with high affinity since the informant emphasizes that it is a social activity that gives "very" good training and that it is "always" okay to play. The next excerpt also highlights turn taking, cooperation, and children's happiness, but also patience, the ability to celebrate the success of others, and to be flexible concerning game rules.

> 12051573: I think it's a good way to learn to cooperate, wait for your turn, train patience, to rejoice concerning others success. Good social training. /…/ Because I see happy children! And children which many times deal with conflicts on their own during the game, for example by adjusting the rules of the game :) It is important to learn how to deal with bad luck and respect the rules, but it works just as well if all participants agree to that rules are adaptive.

The excerpt emphasizes that it is "important" (i.e., a high affinity) to learn to accept defeat, that others can win, and to handle bad luck. Social competence is described as an ability to respect game rules and to adjust and develop game rules together with other participants. This provides opportunities to negotiate the rules in a manner that satisfies all participants.

Substituting digital games

A third prominent discourse was directed to the fact that board games should be seen as a substitute for playing digital games, as in the following excerpt.

> 12044129: We often play analogue games. Digital games are never used at our leisure-time centre since we know that many children are playing way too much at home. The children are, on the other hand, writing all the documents that are sent home to the parents. They make nice weekly schedules that depicts the activities during the educational holidays and they take photos of the activities and put them in a picture frame in the hallway.

The excerpt above uses several words that indicate a strong affinity. It is asserted that they "often" play analogue games. It is also understood that the reason for this is that "many" children are playing digital games at home "way too" much. This should be seen as a strong negative affinity concerning both the number of children engaged in digital play and how much time they spend playing those games at home. The perception that children spend a lot of time playing digital games at home is also evident in the following excerpt.

> 12087784: I think that children should learn to play analogue games, I don´t think there are so many that play board games at home…It is easier to sit down at the computer or the iPad and play…But the children miss out much of the community spirit and the social practice…To win-lose, explain game rules and follow those rules! Wait for their turn, get new fellow relations with the game as an activity.

Digital games are depicted as "easier"—a weak negative affinity (i.e., there is more motivation to start playing digital games than regular board games when at home). Digital games are, however, not seen as supporting social relations, social development, or interaction with other children. This indicates that the staff member thinks that children play digital games in isolation at home. The substituting digital games discourse highlights that board games are, at least partially, used as a device to enable children to participate in activities

that they do not participate in at home. This is in line with the Education Act (2010), which states that leisure-time centres should take a comprehensive view of the students and their needs as its starting point. Avoiding digital games at the leisure-time centre can therefore, be seen as a way of stimulating children's comprehensive development and learning.

Learning cognitive abilities

The participants emphasized that board games contribute to developing cognitive skills. Several skills were mentioned, one of the most common being the ability to think strategically.

> 12045873: We want the children to be challenged when they are playing games. They get opportunities to use experiences and things they learn at school. Logical thinking is a general property concerning our games. We don't use junior variants, we think that the children learn 'senior' games fast. /…/ It is developing to play analogue games. The interaction between children and adults is interesting to observe. It is usually very developing discussions when we play games.

It appears that the informant wants the children to be challenged when they are playing—that playing board games is not merely for amusement. The games are also expected to contribute to the children's development. In this case, the focus is on the development of logical thinking, which is seen as a prominent reason for using board games at this leisure-time centre. The excerpt also highlights that children, by playing board games at the leisure-time centre, get opportunities to use experiences from school and that the leisure-time centre contributes to the consolidation of knowledge emphasized in school. It also indicates that the staff are making observations and evaluations regarding the interactions between children and other staff members when they play (cf. Andersson 2013). The informant also expresses a high affinity concerning the discussions that emerge during the games, which are seen as "very" developing. The following short excerpt also emphasizes interaction, but in this case, it is the interaction between children that is stressed.

> 12172012: They become committed, it is a lot of interaction between the children concerning rule interpretations etcetera. Good for language development.

This excerpt also highlights language use concerning, for example, discussions about how rules should be understood. Here, language interaction has a high affinity since it is emphasized that there is "a lot of interaction" between the children. The excerpt does not highlight strategic thinking, as in the previous excerpt; instead language development is emphasized. The following excerpt highlights the acquisition of mathematics skills with the help of board games. The excerpt also underlines a division between the board games used in school and those used in the leisure-time centre.

> 12166181: The pupils know where the games are, and during lessons, they know from the start that they have games they could choose. They ask if they are uncertain and learn that it is okay to play. /.../ Different sorts of math games that trains mathematics in different ways. At the leisure-time centre it is games such as 'Thief and Police', 'Ludo', and other common games.

The first three sentences describe the use of board games during school. Since staff at leisure-time centres often work both in school during school hours and in the leisure-time centre after school, it is possible to describe the use of board games in both of these activities. It appears that board games used in school, as far as the informant is concerned, are di-

rected towards mathematics, while games used in the leisure-time centre do not tend to be particularly directed in this way. The board games *Thief and Police* and *Ludo* used in the leisure-time centre are games that use dice and could be seen to develop mathematics skills. Here, however, they were not seen in this way, indicating different motivations for using board games in school and in the leisure-time centre. The following excerpt also highlights mathematics. Prior to this, the informant described many of the board games used at the leisure-time centre and concluded by mentioning the reasons for buying the games and why these games are used.

> 12064844: We have bought some of these games for connecting to mathematics. Other games have been bought since the children have wished for them.

In contrast to the previous excerpt, here it is asserted that some of the games in the leisure-time centre activity were bought to develop or enhance mathematical skills. The use of the word "some" indicates a somewhat lower degree of positive affinity—some, but not all, board games are bought to practice mathematics. Nevertheless, the staff are attentive to opportunities for developing mathematical skills. At the same time, it also appears that the children are given the opportunity to express their game preferences. This could be seen as a way of complying with the children's interests and of offering meaningful leisure and recreation during their stay at the leisure-time centre.

The staff's subject positions

The analysis of the staff's descriptions of their social identity or subject position when playing board games with the children focused on the power relations between staff and children and on describing the specific subject positions the staff settled into. The answers in the web survey revealed that there were three positions: developer, supervising judge, and participant. These positions will be described as distinct, but, as with the previously described discourses, the informants' positions are most often articulated together.

Developer

Taking the position of a developer means trying to develop certain skills in children by playing games with them.

> 12062107: Sometimes to activate certain children, sometimes because I want some children to practice a certain ability sometimes 'just' because it is fun.

The answer describes both a wish to activate children who are not engaged in a particular activity and to play games because it is a fun thing to do with the children. Once again, this indicates that playing games is seen as a fun activity that is also used to influence the structure of the leisure-time centre activity. However, the participant also describes a transitivity process wherein games are used to develop abilities. The excerpt does not specify which abilities—cognitive abilities, social abilities, or both—that are focused on, but it describes the goal of the activity as being to develop through "practice". The informant also adopts the position of someone who possesses power and knowledge in relation to the children,

who should be developed. The following excerpt also emphasizes a purpose directed towards development when playing games.

> 12166181: The same [position] as the pupils or I use it [the board game] in an educational purpose. 'You don´t learn anything if you play games' is a rather common opinion amongst my pupils despite my talking about the purpose of the games.

The informant starts the sentence by claiming that his or her position is the same as that of the children, that they are seen as equals. However, the informant also has an "educational purpose" wherein the games are "used" for reasons beyond just participating as a co-player. This shows that the informant's position transforms from being a co-player to taking a position as a developer. These reasons are, however, not always in line with the children's reasoning about games. The children often do not consider learning to be an aspect of playing games, although the informant tries to describe the purposes of different games.

Supervising Judge

The supervising judge is a position where the overall control of the game play is stressed. This includes managing the game and the way participants are performing.

> 12047557: Most often, the one that pull the strings and notify whose turn it is and control that no one cheats (which disgusts me).

This excerpt shows that the informant controls much of the game, and the goals in this action process are to facilitate the playing by "pull[ing] the strings" and "notify[ing]" the participants regarding turn taking. The excerpt indicates that the informant's relation to the children during the game is superior since he or she supervises the game and also has "control" over adherence to the rules. The next excerpt also highlights board game rules but invites other children into the game as well.

> 12047929: I start up the game, usually discuss the rules before we start and involve other children.

Discussing rules is seen as important and should be seen as a way to inform the children what is allowed and to make sure that they have understood how to play the game. This position indicates that the staff member both introduces the game and participates while playing, which means that he or she must know how the game should be performed. This indicates a superior position, but since the staff member "discuss[es]" the rules with the children, rather than informing them of the rules, the children seem to be invited to express their understanding of the rules. This does not, however, exclude the staff member from having the final say concerning the game rules, and, in this way, he or she acts as a supervising judge. The staff member also "involves other children", which indicates an active supervisor and is well in line with the previously discussed supporting social structure discourse.

Participant

When a staff member takes the participant position, he or she participates under the same terms as the children. This could mean not having any specific intentions when playing board games with children. However, as the excerpt below points out, a specific intention can be performed using a passive position.

> 12045873: A passive role. I think that the children should have opportunities to act.

Having a "passive role" means that the staff member pulls back from a leading teacher position and gives the children "opportunities" to be in charge or to have an equal relation with the adult. This should be seen as an intentional act to acknowledge the children and thereby support their social development (cf. Anderson, 2013; Haglund, 2015). The next excerpt also indicates that the staff member functions as a participant and also has the opportunity to chat with the children.

> 12150029: As any adversary. You often get opportunities to chat more if there´s only two of you.

Taking an "adversary" position indicates that the adult is adopting an equal position to the children when playing board games together. It is also mentioned that there are opportunities to "chat more" if there are not so many children participating. This indicates that the informant appreciates talking to children, which is also a focus in the concluding excerpt.

> 12178037: If I can afford the time. The children often ask if you want to play with them and then you get the opportunity to sit down and chat with someone/a few.

The excerpt indicates that it is not always possible to play board games with the children since the informant has other pressing issues that must be performed. However, playing board games is a popular activity, and the children often ask the staff to participate. The excerpt also indicates that playing board games is an opportunity to sit down and "chat" with children. The opportunity to chat should, in both excerpts, be seen as a bonding opportunity, a goal that is part of the cultural tradition of leisure-time centres (cf. Haglund, 2015; Pihlgren & Rohlin, 2011; Ursberg, 1996).

Discussion

The web survey analysis aimed to find why staff at leisure-time centres use board games in leisure-time centres. This has been described with the help of four prominent discourses: supporting social structure, learning social competence, substituting digital games, and learning cognitive abilities. These discourses are seen as different ways of representing aspects of the world—here, the function of board games in leisure-time centres (cf. Fairclough, 2003). The supporting social structure discourse should be seen as the most prominent of these discourses since the other discourses are subordinated in different ways. The supporting social structure discourse should be seen as part of the core work in leisure-time centres (cf. Evaldsson, 1993; Haglund, 2015; Saar et al., 2012), and board games are used as devices for constructing the favoured social structure—a structure that focuses upon the promotion of positive relations and fellowship amongst children. Emphasising relations and fellowship should be seen as intertextually rooted in a child-minding culture (cf. Evaldsson, 1993; Ursberg, 1996), and this position still appears to dominate discursive practice. The use of board games may, however, vary between different leisure-time centres—some use it as a conscious structured activity, while others use it as a means to prevent social disorder. This indicates that there are different local discursive practices (cf. Fairclough, 2010) and differences concerning social practice (cf. Fairclough, 1992).

The assumption of the learning social competence discourse that playing board games develops social skills and emotions, the ability to follow rules, turn taking, and handling bad luck is well in line with game research that emphasizes learning opportunities provided by games (Carlisle, 2009; Hromek & Roffey, 2009). This discourse is also closely related and dependent upon the previously described supporting social structure discourse. It is closely related as emphasizing social competence has been an integral element of traditional work at leisure-time centres and is therefore intertextually related to a social pedagogical arena (cf. Rohlin, 2001). It is dependent because it is difficult to enhance children's social competence when the social structure is inadequate (i.e., when positive relations and fellowship are not emphasized). Supporting social structure should, therefore, be seen as vital for developing opportunities to learn social competence through board games.

The substituting digital games discourse can be seen as a consequence of the promotion of positive relations, fellowship, and the development of social skills in the preceding discourses. The substituting digital games discourse presupposes that children often play digital games at home and that children play digital games in isolation (i.e., digital games do not contribute to positive relations or the enhancement of children's social competence). Available statistics support statements that children often play digital games at home. According to the Swedish Media Council (2015), 27% of the participating parents asserted that their children (5–8 years) play digital games every day, and 46% stated that their children played digital games some days each week. The statistical material does not, however, give any indication of whether digital games were played alone or together with friends.

The last prominent discourse—learning cognitive abilities—emphasizes opportunities to develop different cognitive skills such as strategic thinking, language, and mathematics (cf. Evaldsson & Corsaro, 1998; Siegler & Ramani, 2008). This discourse has a somewhat different point of departure compared to the proceeding discourses. Some of the written answers, particularly those that focused on mathematics, connect in different ways to the leisure-time centre's relation to school and should be seen as an expression of the increasing collaboration between these institutions. Neither older steering documents nor older research concerning staff at leisure-time centres stresses the development of cognitive skills. The emphasis on these skills in this study should therefore be seen as intertextually influenced by the leisure-time centres transition from the social pedagogical arena to the educational arena and a more developed cooperation with schools (cf. Andersson, 2013; Rohlin, 2001). The emphasis on cognitive skills within leisure-time centres is a relocation, a recontextualising, of meanings from school (cf. Fairclough, 2010). However, the informants who emphasized cognitive skills were, compared to those who stressed social competence, rather few.

As mentioned earlier the analysis of the staff´s subject positions while playing board games revealed three positions: developer, supervising judge and participant. The developer position corresponds to those discourses that stress learning social competence and learning cognitive abilities with the help of board games. The developer also, however, appears to be keen to engage many children through playing and stresses the importance of having fun while playing. This corresponds with the assignment to offer meaningful leisure and recreation and with the supporting social structure discourse. The developer position indicates that the informants, whether they try to develop social competence or develop cognitive

abilities, adopt a power position (cf. Giddens, 1979), stressing that the educational purpose of game playing corresponds to a teacher position. This is in line with recent steering documents concerning leisure-time centres (cf. The Education Act, 2010; The National Agency for Education, 2011). The supervising judge position adopts, as with the developer position, a superior power position in relation to the children. Informants who adopted this position strived for overall control concerning the unfolding of the game. Besides facilitating play and in that way supporting a positive social structure, the supervising judge appears to limit the educational aspects of the game and concentrates on developing children's social competence by stressing turn taking and following game rules. This position depicts a distinct leader and emphasizes content that is in line with older social pedagogical traditions (cf. Rohlin, 2001). The participant position is, in contrast to the former positions, one where the informants participate under the same terms as the children. This position emphasizes opportunities to support, interact, and chat with children; the reasons for adopting this position are to support and get to know the individual child and to support the social structure. This position therefore corresponds with the supporting social structure and the learning social competence discourses. The three positions described were often articulated together—the informants often described a social practice in which they adopted different positions while playing. The supervising judge and the participant position were most often articulated together, while the developer position was less frequently described and also less often articulated together with the other positions.

The social practices of the informants, described through their discourses regarding their reasons for using board games in the leisure-time centre, show an activity based on social pedagogical traditions. The positions the staff settled into while playing board games also drew mostly from a social pedagogical arena. However, playing board games also has features that emphasize traditional school related content, which indicates that existing norms are not only reproduced but also, in some respects, transformed (cf. Giddens, 1984). Intentions to use board games as devices for developing social competence and cognitive abilities and promoting of fellowship were described, although the study cannot show that these competences and abilities actually improved. This would be an interesting area for further research. Such research would probably offer opportunities to improve the social practices in leisure-time centres and in schools and in that way support children's competences and abilities.

References

Andersson, B. (2013). *Nya fritidspedagoger – I spänningsfältet mellan tradition och nya styrformer.* Institutionen för tillämpad utbildningsvetenskap. Umeå universitet. Umeå: Print & Media.

Bay-Hinitz, K., Peterson, R. F., & Quilitch, R. H. (1994). Cooperative games: A way to modify aggressive and cooperative behaviors in young children. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis, 27*(3), 435–446.

Carlisle, R. (2009). Introduction. In R. P. Carlisle (ed.), *Encyclopedia of play in today´s society, Volume 1*, X–XII. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Cartmel, J. (2007). *Outside school hours care and schools.* Thesis. Centre for Learning Innovation. Brisbane: Queensland University of Technology

Connolly, J. A., Doyle, A., & Reznick, E. (1988). Social pretend play and social Interaction in preschoolers. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 9*(3), 301–313.

Elofsson, J., Gustafsson, S., Samuelsson, J., & Träff, U. (2016). Playing number board games supports 5-year-old children's early mathematical development. *The Journal of Mathematical Behavior, 43*, 134–147.

Fairclough, N. (1992). *Discourse and social change.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Fairclough, N. (2003). *Analysing discourse. Textual analysis for social research.* New York: Routledge.

Fairclough, N. (2010). *Critical discourse analysis. The critical study of language.* Harlow: Pearson Education Limited.

Fairclough, N. & Wodak, R. (1997). Critical discourse analysis. In T. van Dijk (Ed.) *Discourse as social interaction. Discourse studies: A multidisciplinary introduction.* Volume 2. London: SAGE.

Fischer, N. & Klieme, E. (2013). Quality and effectiveness of German all-day schools: Results of the study on the development of all-day schools. In J. Ecarius, E. Klieme, L. Stecher, & J. Woods (Eds.), *Extended education – an international perspective* (pp. 27–52). Opladen: Budrich.

Giddens, A. (1979). *Central problems in social theory.* London: MacMillan Press Ltd.

Giddens, A. (1984). *The constitution of society.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Gobet, F., de Voogt, A., & Retschitzki, J. (2004). *Moves in mind: The psychology of board games.* Hove: Psychology Press.

Haglund, B. (2015). Everyday practice at the Sunflower: the staff's representations and governing strategies as contributions to the order of discourse. *Education Inquiry, 6*(2), 209–229.

Hall, S. (1997). The work of representation. In S. Hall (ed.), *Representation. Cultural representations and signifying practices.* London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Harvard Maare, Å. (2016). *Designing for peer learning. Mathematics, games, and peer groups in leisure-time centers.* Diss. Lund University Cognitive Studies 165.

Hromek, R. & Roffey, S. (2009). Promoting social and emotional learning with games: "It's fun and we learn things". *Simulation & Gaming, 40*(5), 626–644.

Johansson, I. (1984). *Fritidspedagog på fritidshem. En yrkesgrupps syn på sitt arbete. (Göteborg Studies in Educational Sciences 100).* Göteborg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis.

Kane, E., Ljusberg, A. L., & Larsson, H. (2013). Making magic soup—The facilitation of play in school-age childcare. *International Journal of Play*, *2*(1), 7–21.

Kane, E. & Petrie, P. (2015). Becoming-player in in school-age child care. *Reconceptualising Educational Research Methodology, 5(*1), 18–31.

Koh, E., Kin, Y. G., Wadhwa, B., & Lim, J. (2012). Teacher perceptions of games in Singapore schools. *Simulation & Gaming, 43*(1), 51–66.

Lager, K. (2016). Learning to play with new friends: systematic quality development work in a leisure-time centre. *Early Child Development and Care, 186(*2), 307–323.

Linderoth, J. (2011). Beyond the digital divide: An ecological approach to gameplay. *Proceedings of DiGRA 2011 Conference: Think Design Play.*

Linderoth, J. (2014). Spel i skolan: Det regelstyrda lärandets möjligheter. In A. Lantz-Andersson & R. Säljö (Eds.), *Lärare i den uppkopplade skolan.* Malmö: Gleerups.

Moseley, A. & Whitton, N. (2014). *New traditional games for learning: A case book.* New York: Routledge.

Oren, A. (2008). The use of board games in child psychotherapy. *Journal of Child Psychotherapy, 34*(3), 364–383.

Pálsdóttir, K. Þ. (2012) *Care, learning and leisure: the organisational identity of after-school centres for six-to nine-year old children in Reykjavík.* Diss. Reykjavík: University of Iceland.

Pihlgren, A. & Rohlin, M. (2011). Det "fria" barnet. In A. Klerfelt & B. Haglund (Eds.), *Fritidspedagogik – fritidshemmets teorier och praktiker* (pp. 14–41). Stockholm: Liber AB.

Saar, T., Löfdahl, A., & Hjalmarsson, M. (2012). Kunskapsmöjligheter i svenska fritidshem. *Nordisk Barnehage forskning*, *5(*3), 1–13.

Sharp, J. (2011). I love Pandemic (and I despair for serious games). In G. Costikyan & D. Davidson (Eds.), *Tabletop: Analog game design*. Halifax, NS: ETC Press.

Shernoff, D. J. & Vandell, D. L. (2007). Engagement in after-school program activities: Quality of experience from the perspective of participants. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, *36*(7), 891–903.

Siegler, R. S., Ramani, G. B. (2009). Playing linear number board games – but not circular ones – improves low-income preschoolers' numerical understanding. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 101*(3), 545–560.

Stecher, L. & Maschke, S. (2013). "Out-of-school education" – A new chapter in educational research? In J. Ecarius, E. Klieme, L. Stecher & J. Woods (Eds.), *Extended education – an international perspective* (pp. 11–26).

Svensson, R. (1981). *Offentlig socialisation. Det nya fritidshemmet i teori och praktik.* Lund: Liber-Läromedel.

The Education Act. (2010). *SFS 2010: 800.* The Department of Education.

The National Agency for Education. (2011). *Curriculum for the compulsory school, preschool class and the recreation centre* (Modified 2016). Stockholm: Wolters Kluwers kundservice.

The National Agency for Education. (2014). *Recreation centres. General recommendations with comments.* Stockholm: Fritzes kundservice.

The National Agency for Education. *Statistik om fritidshem.* Retrieved on October 4, 2016, from http://www.skolverket.se/statistik-och-utvardering/statistik-i-tabeller/fritidshem/statistik-om-fritidshem-1.23632

The Swedish Media Council. (2015). *Småungar & medier. Fakta om små barns användning och upplevelser av medier.* Stockholm: The Swedish Media Council.

Ursberg, M. (1996). *Det möjliga mötet. En studie av fritidspedagogers förhållningssätt i samspel med barngrupper inom skolbarnsomsorgen* (Vol. 122). Almqvist & Wiksell International.

Vandell, D. L., Pierce, K. M., & Dadisman, K. (2005). Out-of-school settings as a developmental context for children and youth. *Advances in child development and behavior*, *33*, 43–77.

Whyte, J. C. & Bull, R. (2008). Number games, magnitude representation, and basic number skills in preschoolers. *Developmental Psychology*, *44*(2), 588.