Transition from pre-school to school: Emphasizing early literacy

The education of the child shall be directed to... the development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential.


Comments and reflections by researchers from eight European countries
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- Germany:
- Austria:
- Denmark:
- Greece:
- Hungary:
- Iceland:
- Poland:
- Sweden:

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Foreword

by Ingrid Pramling Samuelsson & Irene Kaschefi-Haude

More than any other phase in life, early childhood entails a succession of transitions as young children develop rapidly. Young children eagerly seek new challenges that test and apply their evolving physical, social, cognitive and emotional capacities. Every child has rights, including the rights to education, participation, play and recreation. Children’s rights are central to our approach because adopting the language of rights helps to point out the responsibility of those professionals working to support children’s development; and thinking in terms of rights promotes respect for the children’s creative force in influencing their environments. We view the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and associated general documents as central for all work with children.

Successful transitions are challenging and therefore rewarding. However, they should not confront young children with obstacles they cannot reasonably overcome. Every child has a different starting point which needs to be respected. For young children’s transitions to be successful, we must recognise that early childhood is a phase in life carrying the same rights and importance as any others. It is not merely a training ground for becoming older, but a time for society to help children cross new thresholds. Peers, families and communities play a critical role in priming children for their next steps in life.

In line with the perspective of life-long learning, there have been and still are on-going discussions in many countries about transitions between different stages in the school system. One of these transitions is the one between early childhood education and primary school, two educational systems that emerged from different traditions and with different intentions. For early childhood education the focus has been the child’s development as a whole, but particularly the personal development. Compulsory school on the other hand has had the intention to convey specific areas of knowledge to children. At the same time these two educational systems have begun to narrow one another. In schools there is a growing awareness concerning the importance of the life-experiences children have for further learning, but also how school contributes to the whole life of a child and not only to the development of knowledge. In early childhood education, there is more awareness of young children’s potentials and skills in trying to make
sense of the world around them (Gopnick, Meltzoff, & Kuhl, 1999). This has led to the notion of children as competent learners from early years. Children however, never become more competent than their surroundings, that is, what the teacher provides in the way of experiences and environment (Sommer, 2005a). It is important in this discussion to realise that early childhood education is the child’s first school, since it is an institution, which has a curriculum or guidelines in how to influence children’s learning and development, and there are professionals working to make it happen (Johansson & Pramling Samuelsson, 2003).

Changing educational systems takes time, and different countries have come longer or shorter ways towards developing a central theme like a thread through the whole educational system, and that also includes the transition between early childhood education and primary school. The so far outlined background leads us to the projects within the framework of the Early Years Transition Programme (EASE), focussing on the question of transition on a European level. Participants come from eight countries: Austria, Denmark, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Germany, Poland and Sweden.

The project of two years comes to an end and in this report we will summarise the results and point out what we learnt. The aims of the project were to:

- maximize cooperation between the early childhood sector and primary school and thus facilitate the transition
- promote the involvement and exchange of views between parents and professionals of both sectors
- develop inter-connecting curricula in early literacy and language practice within a participatory approach
- assess children’s literacy learning and thus encourage them to reflect on their own learning processes and to empower them to become autonomous learners throughout life

Through the extended cooperation and collaboration between countries, we found out many differences, e.g. concerning the required level of training for teachers of this age group, concerning the curriculum or frame-work, concerning the educational system in general, etc. Each country has however made an effort to bridge the gap between pre- and primary school together with the teachers, professionals or parents they have involved in the project. The focus on literacy in this cooperation has been productive, since it is considered to be one of the main tasks for pre- and primary schools in Europe. We feel quite satisfied with the results of the project, although there is of course a lot more to do in order to establish a system all over Europe from the early years to compulsory school. But we belief that the approach we have used and the indicators and method for tracing and developing children’s literacy skills can be very useful tools for teachers in the transition period between pre- and primary school.

Finally we want to thank everybody who contributed to the project as a whole as well as to this report, especially we would like to thank John Bennett very much who has been our external evaluator and taken part in all our meetings around Europe.
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Introduction

by Ole Henrik Hansen, Irene Kascheli-Haude, Ingrid Pramling Samuelsson & Anders Skriver Jensen

1.1 Abstract

This article deals with the Learning-Stories approach developed by Margaret Carr. It is based on narrative assessment which makes learning visible in such a way that the learning community (children, families, teachers and others) can foster ongoing and diverse ways of learning.

Learning-stories integrate learning dispositions into a story framework and include an analysis of the learning.

This mode of documenting children’s learning gives feedback to learners, educational staff and families dedicated to better learning and teaching. The goal is to assist teachers in the process of noticing, recognising, and responding to learning in order to reflect the integral way in which children learn and to enhance children’s sense of themselves as capable individuals and competent learners.

In the EASE project we have adjusted the Learning-Stories approach to fit the interest in early literacy. We have developed a list of early literacy indicators to assist teachers in spotting early literacy aspects of children’s everyday activities. The indicators are also available for inspiration once the learning story has been captured, as they can function as guidelines for analyzing the early literacy content of the learning story.

The EU-project presented in this documentation is based on an approach that embraces a view of learning which focuses on the relationship between the learner and the environment, and seeks ways to document complex reciprocal and responsive relationships in that environment. We have adapted the New Zealand learning stories, which are holistic and general, to a more didactical approach, where the content and the object of the child’s learning become central. The content we are focusing on in the EASE project...
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

is early literacy. Children’s learning dispositions and the competences acquired by children and the strategies they have applied in acquiring them are central. This approach is seen as paving the way to more individualised learning where the child is seen as a capable and competent learner. We are emphasizing interaction and communication between children, and between children and their teachers.

1.2 Background


The curriculum framework recognises new conceptions of early childhood education (*Carr, May, & Podmore*, 1998). The focus is on the learner as an individual-in-action, and learning as transacted and distributed (*Salomon*, 1993). Four guiding principles establish this new concept of curriculum: Empowerment, holistic development, family and community, and relationships. Simultaneously the Ministry of Education funded formative assessment research projects (*Carr, May, & Podmore*, 1998; *Carr*, 2006) that were to try out the empowering, holistic, transactional and ecological nature of *Te Whāriki* in different early childhood settings. The instrument for assessment was called learning stories.

1.3 Learning-Stories

Using learning-stories is a method of credit-based narrative assessment that makes learning visible. As a consequence, it is valued so that the learning community (children, families, teachers and others) can foster ongoing and diverse learning pathways. Documentation is a central aspect of this assessment. This mode of documenting children’s learning gives feedback and additional hints to learners, staff and families in the interest of better learning and teaching. The goal is to assist teachers in the process of noticing, recognising, and responding to learning within a socio-cultural curriculum and to contribute to discussions about assessments.

The learning-story approach includes practices that:

- enhance children’s sense of themselves as capable individuals and competent learners
- reflect the holistic way that children learn
- reflect the reciprocal relationships between the child, teachers and the learning environment
- involve parents and where appropriate the extended family
- document children’s engagement in learning experiences

1.4 Subsequent assessment of the learning influences ongoing learning

One important connection between assessment and learning is feedback. Research tells us that feedback to learners improves learning. Some of this feedback will be carried out through documentation (such as assessments that families and teachers can pass on to children and photographs which children can interpret themselves). Some of this will be verbal and some will be non-verbal (through a gesture, a nod,
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

or a smile). Feedback tells the learners what outcomes are valued in the learning community and how they are doing, and it acknowledges the goals that children set for themselves. Teachers share stories as well as feedback, and this enriches their abilities to notice, recognise developments, and respond to them.

1.5 Learning dispositions in action

Learning stories integrate learning dispositions into a story framework and include an analysis of the learning. Margaret Carr refers to dispositions, ‘as combinations of being ready, willing and able that emerge from learning experiences which occur often and which are supported, recognised and highlighted’ (page 93).

Learning and development will be stimulated by involving the child in progressively more complex patterns of reciprocal activity and by gradual shifts in the balance of power from the teacher to the learner. These shifts reflect children’s ability and inclination to steer their own course, set their own goals, assess their own achievements, and take on some of the responsibility for learning. Children in this way will construct new knowledge, by becoming curious, getting involved, persisting, communicating, and taking on responsibility. The competence acquired by the children and the acquisition strategies they have developed are of central importance.

1.6 The EASE adaptation: Learning stories and early literacy

As already stated, the original learning story approach to documentation is holistic, and the learning dispositions in focus are somewhat generic, focusing on children’s learning and personal development more generally. The EASE project is—on the contrary—built around a specific interest in early literacy related to transition. An adaptation was needed; an adaptation that would be able to fruitfully address the following two parallel concerns: One regarding the early literacy curriculum and one regarding the (re)design of the actual learning story template. In short: The task was to optimize the learning story approach for the focus on early literacy, without forgetting or betraying the versatility of the original design.

With regards to the early literacy curriculum, the socio-cultural core of the learning story approach dictated a childrens’ perspective (Broström, 2006; Strandell, 1997) sensitive to the rich and diverse forms of literate and pre-literate activities that happen every day in early childhood settings. This in turn meant a focus on literacy as something tied to social events (Gee, 1996; 2002; Street, 1995), and on the whole a questioning of the traditional borders between oral and written language. Literacy as a means of constructing meaning is inclined to view speaking, reading and writing as different strategies of communication instead of sets of discrete skills. Whether this communication is drawing in the sand of the sandbox, making play-money to pay the bill for sandcakes in the “restaurant” at the pre-school, participating in read-aloud-activities by using dialogue in the classroom, scribbling and doodling small stories—it is calling for an early literacy curriclum fit to actually see and recognize such activities. Both function as important stepping stones on the way to (adult) literacy, but also as meaningful social events in their own right. Emphasis is on early literacy in diverse contexts of peer-to-peer interactive learning, and on the qualitites of the one-on-one teacher-to-child interactions.

The adaptation (or: the early literacy transformation) of the learning story template has a somewhat turbulent history. The EASE project was implemented with a strong participatory dimension. The teach-
ers participating in the project were regularly called upon to try out and reflect on various draft versions of a learning story template intended to capture the ambitions indicated in the above paragraph on curriculum. Central to the matter was—and is—a list of early literacy indicators, intended to help the teachers discover the early literacy qualities in the activities of the children. In this way the indicators have a “what to look for” function. Additionally, the indicators are thought of as tools in the interpretation and analysis of the learning stories.

By employing a list of indicators, we are aware of the risk of narrowing the pedagogic practice. From a “purist” socio-culturally oriented position, indicators are viewed as promoting an unwanted, so called tick-off approach to assessment (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2007), where the focus eventually will be on the child’s weakness or deficits as deducted from a standardized curriculum (indicated by the indicators). The earliest versions of the early literacy learning story template actually had an indicator tick-off list next to the actual story, but this design was eventually abandoned, as it did not connect with the underlying socio-cultural basis of the EASE approach.

Some of the pre-school- and kindergarten class teachers participating in the project objected to abandoning the indicators, as they thought the indicators did a great job in assisting in the task of spotting diverse strands of early literacy in the children’s activities. It was clear that some sort of compromise was needed. The current version of the early literacy learning story template—the EASE adaptation of the learning story approach—tries to hybridize the socio-cultural, holistic traditions of Carr’s approach and the strengths of indicators. The result is a pretty traditional learning story template, with preset boxes for the story, photos, analysis and notes on possible follow-up activities. The indicators have developed to a carefully designed separate hand-out to be used either as observation assistant or as a tool for the analysis of the learning stories of the day. The hand-out is the teachers’ companion in the midst of the action of the actual classroom setting, and can be called upon in the after hours as a tool for the analysis of the learning stories captured. See these handouts as an annex.

The strength of the indicators is that they point to literacy aspects of the everyday practices of the children which are not so obvious, promoting the socio-cultural view that literacy is more than words in textbooks and worksheets. We have recently added context-indicators as guidelines towards early literacy friendly classroom environments and forms of interactions. And as the indicators no longer appear on the actual learning story template, they are not as likely to steal the focus and interfere with the holistic backdrop of the learning story approach.

1.7 A didactical adaptation of learning stories

Although we all believe in a holistic approach to early childhood education, in recent years there has been more emphasis put on young children’s learning. And learning is always learning about something that is an object of learning—something we want children to learn. We also have a lot of information today about how to design pedagogy that will help the children to develop an understanding about different aspects of the world around them (see chapter 3 or e. g. Pramling Samuelsson & Asplund Carlsson, 2008). This means that we in our project have tried to transform the New Zealand learning story approach into a more didactical approach, which means that the object of learning, aspects of literacy, is the content dealt with, while the perspective of the act of learning, how children learn is closely related to the original idea of Carr. We regard it as becoming more didactic since the teacher’s role is considered as equally important to the child’s learning. The teacher has to take the responsibility to make children aware about
the aspects of the world around them that the curriculum states as important, and in most of the European curricula for early childhood education, literacy is a central skill to develop, and the development depends on the experiences provided by the environment, where the teacher’s acting and communication with children is the deciding factor. So the didactical approach means that the teacher does not only follow each child’s development and offer support in it, but also initiate and challenge children’s learning. At the same time, each child’s learning has to be based on their earlier experiences and perspectives (Sommer, Pramling Samuelsson, & Hundeide, 2010).

The following three points are intended to summarize the learning story approach, and the adaptation is aimed at optimizing it for the documentation of children’s learning processes involved in early literacy events:

1. Learning stories emphasize how learning is a social constructivist phenomenon, creating meaning and being inscribed in diverse contexts and forms of interaction.

2. The use of learning stories for documentation of early literacy learning calls for holistic and functional views of literacy, able to see and respond to the often not so obvious literacy qualities in the everyday activities of children.

3. Early literacy indicators do—if used wisely and with caution—assist the teacher both in noticing these literacy qualities and in analyzing the stories captured.

1.8 The content of the report as a whole

Chapter 1: Introduction by Ole Henrik Hansen, Irene Kaschefi-Haude, Ingrid Pramling Samuelsson & Anders Skriver Jensen
Margaret Carr’s learning-stories approach is briefly described, but also how we have adapted this into a more didactic approach by using literacy as the content in the learning stories. This first chapter also describes the EASE project with its intention and aims and how the report is structured.

Chapter 2: Transitions from Preschool to Primary School, by Kalliope Vrinioti, Johanna Einarsdottir & Stig Broström
Here a brief overview of research in the area of transition between pre- and primary-school is outlined, but also the long history of transition questions is being dealt with.

Chapter 3: Early Literacy Learning in the Perspective of the Child: Literacy Stories, by Elisabeth Mellgren, Anders Skriver Jensen & Ole Henrik Hansen
This chapter lays out the socio-cultural theoretical concepts that are forming the basis of the approach to early literacy of the EASE project. But it also describes the indicators of importance for literacy learning like: 1) interaction, 2) expression, 3) structures, 4) graphic symbols and 5) interaction. These ‘early literacy indicators’ are adapted into Early Literacy Stories.

Chapter 4: Observing, Supporting and Challenging Children’s Learning, by Ingrid Pramling Samuelsson
The author enlightens the distinction between child perspectives and children’s perspectives, as well as a conception of development as increased discernment which has become central in early
childhood education. Communication and interaction become key factors and important tools for the teacher in observing, supporting and challenging children’s learning.

Chapter 5: A Seamless Transition or an Oasis to Rest In?
The Children’s Pictures of the Swedish Pre-School Class, by Helena Ackesjö
This chapter presents a study of children drawing pictures of their days in the pre-school class. The pictures are regarded as literacy events in the study. The result shows that the pictures reflect the pre-school class as a playful child-centred educational practice at the crossroads between pre-school and compulsory school, or as an oasis for the children to rest in.

Chapter 6: “In pre-school we speak Swedish.”
Children’s Perception of Multilingualism, by Hiba Abou-Touk
The focus here lies on children with another mother tongue than the majority language. A group of children have been interviewed about the use of their mother tongue as well as Swedish. They are quite aware how their mother tongue is being used less than Swedish in institutional settings, and that it was chiefly being able to speak, read and write Swedish that made it possible to participate in Swedish society.

Chapter 7: Connecting Curricula through Action Research, by Jóhanna Einarsdóttir
This chapter is a detailed description of how the EASE project has been carried through in three phases in Iceland with pre- and primary school teachers, and other specialists who took part in the project. The approach reminds the reader about action research since the teacher’s own questions are primarily dealt with.

Chapter 8: The Relationship between Family and Kindergarten, by Ágnes Nyitrai-Szombathelyi, Mónika Kicsák, Judit Villányi & Katalin Zóka
Here the focus is put on values and traditions related to cooperation and collaboration between pre-school and family in Hungary. Also questions concerning the strategy, plan and tasks to deal with as formulated in the Hungarian guideline are described.

Chapter 9: Involvement of Parents, by Roman Lewicki, Anna Pol & Magdalena Bialek
The authors focus on presenting a survey and discussion of the parents’ role in their children’s learning process. It usually happens that children who regularly work at home with their parents are more likely to achieve success than those who do not have an opportunity of cooperation with adults. Thus, parental support in education—at home and in the classroom—is vital to effective learning and discipline and can improve the social and emotional development of young learners.

Chapter 10: Early Literacy in Transition from Pre-School to Primary School: Connecting Curricula, by Irene Sivropoulou & Kalliopi Vrinioti
This chapter is based on an investigation in Greece. The aim was to find out to what extent mixed groups of pre-schoolers and first grade students contribute to early literacy development, as well as to describe teachers’ discoveries about the transition.

Chapter 11: Social Development and the Role of the Preschool from the Viewpoint of the EASE Project, by Johann Pehofer
The author explains how the change in our society at the same time highlights a change in education. We know today, that pre-school already extensively determines the educational success of the child: So this chapter deals with the tasks and obligations of pre-schools in the present society.

Chapter 12: *Analysis of the Questionnaire, by Elisabeth Mellgren & Ingrid Pramling Samuelsson*

In conclusion each country’s results from the questionnaire completed by pre- and/or primary school teachers and parents are presented mainly in terms of the most important results drawn from all the statistics behind it. The most important result is however the change from the first to the second questionnaire, which means that a lot of the participants in EASE have been influenced in their way of looking at transition questions related to literacy.
CHAPTER 2

Transitions from Preschool to Primary School

by Kalliope Vrinioti, Johanna Einarsdottir and Stig Broström

2.1 Abstract

This article deals with transition from pre-school to primary school. Starting with a historical overview presenting Fröbel’s understanding of transition from 1852, it continues with European politics in the 1960s and 1970s and recommendations by the Council of Europe from the 1990s. It finishes with the current political understanding expressed by the OECD. Then the authors define and reflect the word transition in theoretical terms using Bronfenbrenner’s ecological development model. Starting with a short review of international research on transition, the article focuses on depicting the research on children’s transition problems and furthermore outlines a number of so-called transition activities in order to ease children’s transition to school.

2.2 Introduction

Within the framework of international pedagogic discussions, the subject of children’s transition from pre-school to primary school as an issue of educational practice, a subject of research, or a question of educational policy is not new. From its beginning to the present, it has now been discussed for over a century and a half. In 1852, Friedrich Fröbel submitted a detailed plan for the organic linking of pre-school with primary school education, thus laying the groundwork for a systematic discussion of the issue of discontinuity and how to bridge the existing gap in the transition from one level to the next (Grossmann, 1987).

It has also been known since the 1960s that for many European countries the question of children’s smooth transition from pre-school to primary education was directly linked with the demand for achieving a unified curriculum involving kindergarten, primary school, gymnasium [junior high school], and lyceum [senior high school], as well as with the broader question of bottom-up reform of the educational
system from kindergarten to lyceum (Dunlop & Fabian, 2007; Horn & Thiemel, 1982). Arguments for this were drawn from what were new results at the time from the humanities and above all the social sciences concerning the relation between environment and school success. They were closely linked with the demand for equal opportunities at the outset of legislated compulsory education (Husén, 1977), in the sense of ensuring the necessary presuppositions for the equality of results. Possible negative mid- and long-term consequences from interruptions of the continuity in the process of teaching and learning in the transition from one educational setting to another, such as school phobia, functional illiteracy, drop-out rates, etc., were in the majority of cases interpreted as results also stemming from unequal opportunities at the outset of legislated compulsory education. Nearly 40 years have now passed since the 6th summit of European education ministers in Venice (1971), where the problem of educational transitions was for the first time discussed at such a high level, though the various countries had not yet managed to find satisfactory solutions. This of course does not mean that these countries have not gone their separate ways regarding the search for, and discovery of, “satisfactory solutions” (Carle & Daiber, 2008; Neuman, 2002; Oberhuemer, 2006; OECD, 2006).

Recommendations by the Council of Europe to member countries (Fthenakis, 1979) during the era characterized as a period of “reform euphoria”, with the goal of an organic linkage², and collaboration between pre-school and primary school, were shown to be inadequate regarding a number of key points during the decade of “reform sobriety”³ for these countries in the attempt to implement them. For most of these countries, the lack of an institutional framework to ensure the presuppositions for an obligatory collaboration between pre-school and primary school institutions was considered one key point of inadequacy (Woodhead, 1981).

From the mid-1990s and onward, the subject of transition and collaboration came into focus of research again and flourished (Woodhead, 1981). Contributing to this on the one hand were old, but for many countries still unfulfilled, recommendations by the Council of Europe. On the other hand there were the more generally favorable circumstances obtained during the last fifteen years, created by the following: (1) the increase in professional staff, both teaching and research personnel, involved with Early Childhood Education and Care; (2) the founding of scientific societies that made the subject of educational transition the focus of their research activities, e.g. the European Early Childhood Education and Research Association (EECERA); (3) the contribution of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD); (4) the Bologna Process (1999); and (5) the support by the European Union (Vrynioti, 2008).

During the last two decades there has been an increasing interest in educational transitions because the level of success during transition to school or transfer between phases of education, both socially and academically, can be a critical factor in determining children’s future progress and development (Dockeł & Perry, 2007; Dunlop & Fabian, 2002b; Einarsdottir, 2007; Entwisle & Alexander, 1998; Fabian, 2007a; Kagan & Neuman, 1998; Margetts, 2002).

The word transition is rather open; and, in spite of an increasing political and educational interest, it is not very well defined. It deals with border crossing, a physical movement from one physical context to another. Dunlop and Fabian (2002b, p. 148) define transition as “being the passage from one place, stage, state, style or subject to another over time.” Related more specifically to early childhood education,

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¹From the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s.

²Here is meant the creation of an institutional framework for achieving coherence and continuity at the level of objectives, contents, teaching methodology (curriculum), and teacher training.

³From the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s.
transition can be defined as the time between the first visit in the new educational context and the final setting (Fabian, 2007a; Kagan & Neuman, 1998; Griebel & Niesel, 2004).

Kagan distinguished between vertical and horizontal transitions (Kagan, 1991). Vertical transitions deal with moves and changes for the child between educational settings such as pre-school or school or between home and pre-school when children start pre-school. Horizontal transitions involve children’s transitions during their everyday lives between, for instance, after school center and primary school.

### 2.3 Theoretical Perspective

There is no unified, coherent theory for an overall understanding of the issue of transitions that would be adequate for explaining the entire range of developmental challenges as well as problems brought about by the transition at the individual level for the child and his/her parents. Rather, there are various approaches arising from different scholarly fields that may be employed in complementary fashion for a detailed study of the different parameters of transitions (Dockett & Perry, 2007; Griebel & Niesel, 2004).

The ecological developmental model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) is the most fruitful model for studying every type of transition. The model of transitions in the family (Cowan, 1991; Fthenakis, 1998), the theory of critical life events (Filipp, 1995), and the results from research on stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1987) are employed as complements to this model. Any form of transition can be viewed and analysed in the light of Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological developmental model with the following four well-known nested and interrelated levels: macro-, exo-, micro-, and meso systems. Related to the child’s transition, Dunlop and Fabian (2002b) describe in detail how the model can be used to get information of the content of the three environments or microsystems: children’s home world, the pre-school world and the school world. In addition, the interrelations between the three worlds which make up the meso system, where the three worlds are working together, exchange information and empower the children.

These related elements, taken together, provide direction for the development of activities on transition, which, when undertaken by families, pre-schools, and school, combine the most important areas in the child’s life before and after starting school and support the transition. Such connections are highlighted in an ecological model of perspective. Through the interaction and connections between the different areas the adults strive for helping the child to experience continuity and seeing his or her life as a unified whole with an interior progression.

The ecological model helps to raise a number of important questions, and can serve as a tool for getting a better understanding of children’s transition. For example, questions like the following may be raised: Does the child enter school alone or together with a friend? What kind of information does the pre-school and family give the teacher in school? What kind of cooperation do the families, pre-schools and primary schools carry through?

### 2.4 Transition Research

Adults’ views on transitions have been studied widely (Broström, 2002; 2003b; Dunlop & Fabian, 2002b; Einarsdottir, Perry, & Dockett, 2008; Griebel & Niesel, 2003; Johanson, 2002; Margetts, 2002; Peters, 2000; Pramling Samuelsson & Williams-Graneld, 1993, August). In recent years, interest in looking at transitions from children’s perspectives has grown. Several studies have investigated children’s views of their pre-school and school, and the differences between these settings. Review of the literature on
children’s views on transition from pre-school to primary school reveals that children expect a change from being able to play and choose in pre-school to more academic work in primary school. They are also aware that there are new rules and norms that they have to learn and adapt to in primary school (Broström, 2001; 2008; Einarsdóttir, 2003; 2007; Pramling Samuelsson, Klerfelt, & Granell, 1995).

Dockett and Perry (Dockett & Perry, 2007) have summarized the main findings from transition research:

- A positive start at school is linked to positive school outcomes in both academic achievement and social competence.
- Children’s images of themselves as learners are influenced greatly by their school experiences.
- Children who experience academic and social difficulties in the early school years are likely to continue having problems throughout their school careers, and indeed throughout their adult life.
- Children starting school bring with them a wide array of experiences and understandings. As a result they experience the transition to school in different ways.
- Children who experience similar environments and expectations at home and school are likely to find the transition to school an easier process.
- The expectations of participants shape the transition experiences of children starting school.

2.5 Problems in children’s transition to school

International research on starting school suggests that moving from pre-school to school can be challenging, if not traumatic for some children, and especially for children with less than optimal circumstances, for example children with special educational needs or children from dysfunctional families (e.g. Broström, 2002; Napier, 2002; Wagner, 2003).

When children move from pre-school to primary school they experience a change of identity from being a child in pre-school to a student in school, which means they are expected to behave in a certain way and understand the classroom rules, to learn the language of the classroom and to “read” the teacher. When children enter school they often meet a larger physical environment—and it can be difficult to find their way. In pre-school the child belongs to the eldest group of children, and suddenly he is the youngest and is forced to relate to older children. In school the social environment is much more complex; there is a greater number of children compared with the number of children in pre-school, and with that there will be much more competition. In school there are fewer adults, which means less individual attention and interaction with adults than previously. In school children have less autonomy and they are often forced to discipline their own body movement. There is a shift in the academic demands of children; they now meet new, unfamiliar challenges (Dockett & Perry, 2007; Fabian, 2007a; Merry, 2007).

The above mentioned changes do not only challenge children with less than optimal circumstances, but also children from supporting families. Thus, a case study (Broström, 2003a) showed that although pre-school teachers and primary school teachers during the last years had implemented so-called transition activities, like mutual visits before school starts plus conferences on children’s life and development (Broström, 2002), too many children still experience problems when they transit from pre-school to school. The case study (Broström, 2003a) describes four children in their pre-school as independent, active, inquisitive, and exploring persons, each one interacting well with peers. However, during the
first weeks in school these children seemed to change. They exhibited less positive attitudes, became less active, and expressed insecurity. Although these children seemed to have obtained the necessary level of school readiness, they did not feel “suitable” for school. This spoiled their sense of well-being and hindered their engagement as active learners in the new environment and this (temporary) loss of competences might pave the way for poor self-esteem and insecurity in the new setting.
3.1 Abstract

In this article the socio-cultural theoretical concepts that form a basis of the approach to early literacy as understood in the EASE project are outlined. The emphasis which lies on the perspective of the child leads to a holistic and sensitive approach, taking into account the complexity of the child’s situation. The teacher is thought to support and recognize the child’s identity as a reader/writer to be, by responding to five key linguistic aspects: 1) interaction, 2) expression, 3) structures, 4) graphic symbols and 5) interpretation. The article concludes by demonstrating how this view of early literacy is central to the EASE adaptation of the Learning Stories approach, and how the so-called ‘context indicators’ and ‘early literacy indicators’ of this adaptation can be called upon in the creation of what might be called Early Literacy Stories.

According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), one of the democratic rights of every child is to be literate. While all children are more or less born into a literate community of one kind or another, the conditions for learning literacy vary enormously.

In the EASE project, we will pay attention to children’s participation and the process of building up knowledge in connection with language practices. It is a challenge for teachers in early childhood services, pre-school classes and primary school to create an environment that stimulates early literacy, an environment with rich opportunities for language practice of all kinds. We assume that children are competent and creative and generate meaning by talking, listening, communicating with the help
of pictures and texts/reading and writing. The learner’s perspective is in focus. Marton & Booth (2000) find that the world is constituted as an internal relation between the learner and the world. Individuals experience the world in different ways, and this affects their behaviour in different situations. If you wish to understand how an individual handles a situation or a problem, you also have to understand how she/he experiences the situation or problem. Then, according to Runesson (2004), some of the conditions of learning that are connected with the development of certain capacities will become apparent.

Based on the above mentioned theoretical position, we believe that a conscious adult/teacher responds to the linguistic aspects set out in the table below. This table does not claim to reflect the full complexity of spoken and written language, but should be seen as an abstract mind map. For the child to learn about all these aspects, the teacher and child must interact in situations that are meaningful to the child.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interaction</th>
<th>Expressions</th>
<th>Structures</th>
<th>Graphic Symbols</th>
<th>Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>Grammatical strategies</td>
<td>Drawing</td>
<td>Interest in reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attention</td>
<td>Narration</td>
<td>Awareness of language</td>
<td>Scribbling</td>
<td>Inference</td>
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<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Phonological awareness</td>
<td>Letters</td>
<td>Logographic reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions</td>
<td>Argumentation</td>
<td>Meta linguistic aspects</td>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>Orthographic reading</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Interaction** implies some form of communication which requires visual attention to perceive and interpret non-verbal communicative acts such as eye contact, facial expressions and gestures. When you work at, for example, dramatising an event or story, or with different role plays, this wordless communication can be highlighted for reflection and awareness of these modes of expression. Before they have developed a verbal language, children communicate with glances and gestures, and use their voices in different ways (e.g. varying the speed and loudness) to reinforce a message (Söderberg, 1988). Listening is a necessary part of a communicative act, but the ability to listen is often taken for granted. It is a skill that may need support to develop. Being quiet is not synonymous with listening. Listening, asking questions, making confirmatory observations and drawing one’s own conclusions are skills that cannot be taken for granted but need to be highlighted and developed. Any participant in communication needs to pay attention to the questions that a child poses and the comments she/he makes to be able to adapt his/her response.

Spoken expressions, the vocabulary of importance, are developed mainly by talking with others, by naming objects and events, guiding and asking. They allow the young pre-school child who is acquiring his/her language to communicate about the world around him/her. For children and pupils with another native language, the process is more complicated as they have to learn to communicate in several ways. Being able to express words and understand the implications, and to create and develop contents is a sentence-building process for the individual. In multilingual environments, where there is more than one way to express oneself, different words are used for various common indoor and outdoor activities in pre-school, school and in the surroundings. Multilingual children have an advantage when it comes to developing a linguistic awareness of the activities. There is no limit; the vocabulary and conceptions are in constant development, in the context of life-long learning. Words change and the meaning can vary from one period to another. There is no difficulty in adapting vocabulary and curiosity if there is an interest. The differences in the structure of the various modes of expression: developing a narrative
ability for story-telling; naming and describing objects and events; and arguing for an idea and attitude have to be borne in mind.

The structure of language is made visible naturally in multilingual environments. The linguistic diversity that exists in most children’s and pupil’s groups is an asset when it comes to the development of awareness of language. The meta-conversation about reading and texts, grammatical strategies and structures can be the object of learning in a meaningful context. “Playing” with the sentence structure, sounds, tense and gender, etc. develops phonological awareness and awareness of meta-linguistic aspects and an ability to talk about the language expressions. In poems, rhymes and rap, it is natural to focus both on the structure and the meaning of an expression. When children are allowed to participate in contexts where the aspects of meta-linguistics are in focus, they have a good opportunity to develop an awareness of the structure of the language.

Kress (1997) states that children as well as adults create their own language and their own symbols on the basis of their own experiences and previous knowledge—quite contrary to many other theories and traditions in which man is seen as a user of an accepted language, signs and symbols. Kress also claims that speech and writing are a form of communication designed to be maximally intelligible to the participants in a communicative situation. In an initial phase, children’s early writing can only be understood in interaction with the “writer”.

We also know that children who succeed very well in the initial phase of learning to read and write have a good general ability in language practices, a rich vocabulary, can retell sentences/a narrative and take an active part in conversation. They also have a phonological awareness and know about letters and phonics (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998).

We believe that the aspects mentioned above are important for a child’s development to becoming a regular and independent reader. The sum of all these linguistic features is more than the sum of the parts: they should be seen and understood in their complexity and in a context and from the learner’s perspective. There are general characteristics that are common but not a general truth. There is a variation that depends on the context, time, place, culture, etc. How children learn to read and write has been a central issue for many teachers and researchers for many years. What we can say with certainty today is that this issue is very complex and that there is no clear general answer to this question. It is known that “time on the task” is important, and that teachers’ competence in this respect is another important factor. So is teacher/child interaction, and that of child/student. Learning to read and write is a question of developing the children’s communicative abilities. Learning and the development of language movement in speech, texts and genres occur best when they are tailored to the child’s/pupil’s own language and terminology.

A child’s use of graphic symbols may pose a problem; scribbling and drawing can be difficult to distinguish from one another and to discern. For most children, it may be natural to write before they learn to read. Experimenting with pen and paper to express something can be a way to develop a linguistic awareness, that is, an understanding of language, form and structure. By the concept early childhood literacy, we mean various creative ways of using the written language, corresponding to the two concepts “broader textual concept” and “multimodality”. This fits in with the description by Hall (2003), who sees the child’s early writing activity as a competent creation of meaning. What a child achieves on a certain occasion should be seen as an imprint in time of what the child understands at a specific point in time and in a specific context (Kress, 2000; 2003; Gee, 2002).
The above mentioned statement emphasises the fact that the teacher needs to have an open mind when involving children early in various literacy activities. To understand children’s expressions of various writing and communication tools, we believe that the first step is to understand the child’s intentions:

- What does the child wish to communicate?
- In what ways is the written language of the child used to create meaning/understanding of his/her world?
- Pay attention to the child’s issues.

Maria Magnusson (2008) has described a learning study of how two children develop their ability to use graphic symbols to communicate a message. Her aim was to show how children distinguish graphic symbols, to understand the significance of the conditions teachers create and to articulate how graphic symbols can be included as content in pre-school activities. The study revealed a pattern of banners strategies; first the child perceives the graphic symbol, then the meaning of the symbol is varied so the child distinguishes the symbol in parts and as a whole. In this study, the child himself made a sign to the effect that his little sister should not go into his room; he drew a picture of a child and then crossed it out. When the child with the teacher uses the “x” on a drawing of an ice-cream cone and reflects on what this means, the cross is seen to have a general meaning (a ban) and to be applicable to other contexts.

When is there a symbolic meaning and for whom? It can be personal and collective. When we develop an understanding that we can express communication and stories with images and characters, we note that there are letters that are signs for sounds. In a multilingual environment, there are opportunities to contrast different languages and different scripts. In today’s society, there are also several new communication tools such as computers, digital cameras and mobile phones, the Internet, e-mail, blogs, online games, SMS, MMS. Previously different means of expression are now integrated into multimodal expressions, with pictures, text, page layout, colours and shapes, images and sounds.

Taking advantage of multimodal expression is an interpretative process involving various types of competence in literacy. An important prerequisite for developing his/her competence is a child’s interest in reading books, newspapers and other media. To develop as readers takes time, and the time they are engaged in reading is of high significance. Reading pictures is a strategy that may increase in importance; images can be interpreted as a narrative that is personal or collective. Some images, logos, icons, have a precise meaning that is easy to understand, but reading and writing texts is a specific strategy that often has to be taught in a structured way.

In pre-school there is an opportunity to develop children’s interest in texts in everyday life associated with: toys, logos, signs, labels, games (PC, Nintendo, etc.), chat, TV and video, sports, music/songs, shared singing and reading (Eriksen Hagtvet, 2006; Fast, 2007; Gustafsson & Mellgren, 2002; Magnusson, 2008). The teacher’s ability to interact in such an environment and with the pre-school child who has not yet developed any understanding of the alphabetical system varies. To set up the communicative function of written language as a learning object demands much of the teachers in pre-school, as it requires an insight that they themselves lost when they acquired the skill of handling written language as a communicative system. Adopting the perspective of the learner in this area is a great challenge, but it is precisely what is needed when assisting a small child to become a person who can read and write (Gustafsson & Mellgren, 2002). Learning to write and use letters and words are complex processes that take place in complex contexts. We have already abandoned our view of learning to write as a formal skill.
that the child acquires through instruction and practice. The written language experienced by children is changing all the time; what applies to one generation does not apply in the same way to their children and grandchildren. This makes it difficult for the one who is guiding children in the world of the written word. You have to take the child as your starting-point—not your own childhood, but the child you are facing here and now (Gustafsson & Mellgren, 2005).

How children use the letters express how they understand the symbol. Which characters is the child using? What does the letter/letters express? Is there a pattern, a shape that catches the child’s attention? Is it a letter, perhaps the first letter of their name? Is it consonants, vowels, the symbol of phonemes? How are the letters arranged? In rows; in disarray; are words separated by spaces? These are some questions teachers can ask themselves in the interpretation of children’s early writing. Learning with pre-writing, by invented spelling to write rules to acquire and develop conventional writing is a sensitive phase for many children (Richgels, 2002). In order to support the child with interest and recognition, it is necessary to create rich opportunities so that the child may acquire an experience of texts and text-building and is encouraged to ask questions and receive answers without any guidance or teaching advice (Eriksen Hagtvet, 2004; Gustafsson & Mellgren, 2005; Liberg, 2006; Lundberg, 2007).

Research into the learning process has shown that the individual understands something of the world around her/him in a different way than earlier if the teacher knows about critical aspects of learning (Marton, Dahlgren, Svensson, & Säljö, 1977). Children’s experience of writing can, for example, be expressed in various ways depending on the problem and play situations in which the children are taking part, according to Gustafsson and Mellgren (2000). In this perspective, it is thought that becoming a literate person is learning to express oneself in writing as a communicative process and in the light of social and cultural conditions for children’s knowledge and learning. Gustafsson and Mellgren (2005) point out that the intersection between pre-school, pre-school class and school is a critical aspect in transition and children’s early literacy learning. They also point out that the institutions share the same view of literacy, play and the importance of learning, and of how to arrange the learning environments as tools for playing and learning. The conclusion in that study was that

- children establish an understanding and an approach to literacy learning at an early age, and that this tends to be stable;
- in pre-school and school there are traditions and things that are taken for granted with regard to children’s literacy learning that should be rethought in order to reach the goals of the curricula;
- if pre-school and school fail to collaborate and if the teacher does not take the perspective of the learner/child in learning to express themselves in writing, the individual child will be affected negatively;
- it is a challenge for teachers in pre-school to create an environment that stimulates early childhood literacy, an environment with rich opportunities for functional literacy;
- it should be possible to utilise and develop the multimodal opportunities, such as pictures, colours, shapes, design etc. that have been a tradition in pre-school. (Gustafsson & Mellgren, 2005, p. 95)

These results are consistent with the view of Vygotsky (1934/2007) that the external and internal functions of language, language and written language are the primary tools for learning. The external function is communicative, and the internal one is a tool for thinking. Written language has the same function as verbal language, but its external function is more concrete and observable. Its internal function is a tool for reflection and learning at a metacognitive level. The act of writing implies a distance
from the language/words as auditory icons, and the writer assumes the reader’s perspective. Katherine Nelson and Lea Kessler Shaw (2002) studied how pre-school children use and create meaning in words, how word comprehension develops and how they learn to use words as symbols. In a linguistic culture that involves both children and adults, the interpretation of the adults in the child’s immediate environment is often its message, from a context. In such a culture, a child can use words that he/she has not yet developed a general understanding of. In this way learning takes place in a social interaction where children are communicating with others—adults, siblings and/or colleagues—who understand the general meaning of words and concepts (Liberg, 1990; Bruner, 1996; Nelson & Kessler Shaw, 2002).

3.2 Interpretation

An interest in reading and literature is a cultural competence, an ability that is developed through rich experiences (Pramling, Asplund Carlsson, & Klerfelt, 1993). By listening, the child gains access to concepts, words for actions, events, properties, etc. There may be specific words for objects and events and abstract concepts such as fantasies, dreams and thoughts. The text and images that are read have to be interpreted. How children are read to affects children’s attitudes and approaches to texts in different ways depending on the child’s social and cultural background (Heath, 1983). It is not obvious that the children are guided through the talking and questions on the basis of the text that parents read to the child. Nor is it obvious that the children will learn from reading and writing activities at home since they might not pay attention to these cultural activities.

Teachers participating in EASE projects in Sweden have documented repeated joint reading sessions with one or more children. It is not unusual to have reading sessions with individual children in preschool and first grade; it’s usually a group activity. The teachers choose the children that do not seem to be interested in books and reading. Several teachers describe the reading experience they had with individual children, since these would not have been observed if they had only read to a group of children. They were able to follow the varied ways the children had of relating to text and image, both the variation between different children and in individual children at different times. Reading was repeated approximately once a week. In one case, a mother was told repeatedly that it was important to give her boy experience of reading. When the child himself was allowed to choose a book and read it on a couple of occasions with a teacher, he came to the pre-school one morning with his mother and told me happily that now they had read at home. This shows that once the child had a positive reading experience in a pre-school class, it encouraged the mother to read with him at home. The teacher concluded that although good advice is given to parents about what they should do, the child also needs to experience reading in the pre-school class so that he and his parents can also continue to develop at home.

The linguistic experiences that children may gain from reading aloud are extremely important (Adams, 1994). Makin (2003) has reviewed research on this subject and says that the availability of appropriate resources and the interaction between children and the mediating adult/teacher are the two most important aspects of literacy learning. An important aspect of reading is that the child is encouraged to move into the world of imagination represented in the text, and into “the other’s” experiences, inferences, i.e. to go beyond the text itself and link images and text to their own experiences and interpretations (Langer, 2005).

Reading is more than just reading books. In the issue of early literacy learning, it is important to give children varied experiences of reading. A child’s first reading is usually a logographic reading—they read
wholes: logos/images/signs/name/word pictures. Different texts and messages are to be found everywhere in the environment: for commercial purposes; in traffic; in daily life in the surrounding community (Liberg, 2006).

Reading development is a question of developing and acquiring reading strategies. The early logographic reading provides limited opportunities. As the reader can make use of the conventional code to interpret the script according to analyse language sounds and put them in the same words in the spoken language, then we can say that you can make use of orthographic reading (Liberg, 2006; Lundberg, 2007).

3.3 Making it work: Combining Learning Stories with indicators of context and early literacy to create Early Literacy Stories

Learning stories is a socio-cultural approach to documentation in early childhood education and care (ECEC) developed in New Zealand by Margaret Carr (2005). Learning stories are described as narratives that express a desire to evolve the child’s natural curiosity and its attitudes toward exploring. By telling the child’s learning story, the child’s ability to cope with e.g. early literacy challenges, can be increased. Learning stories are in other words not just a method for assessment, but also a learning process. The key element is the development of interest, willingness and ability. And the focus must be on the child’s disposition for learning. Carr understands learning as a social activity, where the child becomes a ‘learner-in-action’, and learning will emerge in the relation between the child and the context (Carr, 2005).

Each learning story is written on a traditional learning story template, with preset boxes for the story, photos, analysis and notes on possible follow-up activities. Each child’s learning stories are collected in portfolios.

The learning story template, early literacy indicators and context indicators are available as downloadable hand-outs translated into a number of different languages. Please refer to the homepage of the EASE project (http://www.ease-eu.com). We’ll not be discussing each indicator in detail here, but provide some overall considerations regarding the use of the indicators. After a presentation of the early literacy and the context indicators, we’ll touch upon some problems with indicators in pedagogy in a more general way, and then demonstrate how the indicators could be used to identify and refine the early literacy potential of one case gathered from the Danish contribution of the EASE project.

3.4 Early Literacy Indicators

Early literacy indicators are for inspiring teachers to see and recognize early literacy in diverse events, not just common-sense reading or writing. Following the socio-cultural tone and the five linguistic aspects presented in this article, teachers and researchers alike need to be able to envision literacy events without being limited to the vocabulary of cognitive skill acquisition. The ability to spot and talk about literacy events in play, drawing, a wide range of peer interactions etc. enables us to create and maintain literacy friendly environments, without having to rely on the traditional, school oriented ways. This way we are well on the road to eventually promote conditions for meaningful literacy events. So the indicators have the potential to enrich pedagogical practices.
On the hand-out, the indicators are grouped into three main kinds of activities which have documented relations to the development of reading and writing skills: 1) storytelling and reading, 2) drawing, writing or scribbling and 3) playing. This is thought to provide some entrance points for observation and analysis, and should not be understood as a threefold, arbitrary logic for sorting the literacy stories into separate categories. Often, indicators from all three categories are applicable to the same early literacy story.

3.5 Context Indicators

Context indicators are types and characters of interactions, activities and facilities that may create a basis for early literacy, and as such context indicators are to be used to assist with observations or as a tool for the analysis of the literacy stories. The Carr-approach represents a change from a model where learning occurs independently of the context, to a model where learning occurs in the relation between the child and the context (see the introductory chapter in this handbook). We are embracing an approach to assessment that emphasizes the child’s benefit on the basis of the entire context. Therefore activities must challenge the children in their actual lives, and activities must relate to contextual elements that the children can combine with their social and cultural world, as they know and conceive it. As a consequence the professionals must be aware of the context elements: when they plan activities; observe activities and analyse activities. On the hand-outs the elements are: 1) type of interaction; 2) adult awareness in the interaction; 3) character of the interaction; 4) activity and 5) facilities used. Those indicators are produced as inspiration, but must be modified to fit specific contexts in different countries and different social and cultural contexts.

3.6 Some notes on indicators: Playing with fire?

As already touched upon in the introductory chapter of this handbook, indicators are to be used with extreme caution. They are tools for enhancing vision, as well as blinders: Even though we try to understand early literacy in broad and holistic ways (and are striving to make the indicators reflect at least parts of the complex theoretical universe behind the presented five linguistic aspects), not every event in the early childhood setting should count as an early literacy event. This is the price we pay for a sharpened focus on early literacy—to focus on something is to some extent to blur the surroundings. But other aspects of ECEC, and not just early literacy, should of course remain in focus at other times. What we are saying is this: Introducing an (-other) early literacy-oriented method of documentation into an ECEC setting, where a plethora of different curriculum objectives and pedagogical traditions, norms and values is already built into the pedagogical framework, is a dangerous act. We need to make sure that these indicators, however broad and holistic, do not end up living a life of their own, being lifted out of the socio-cultural theoretical framework to be misplaced and misused in a modernistic discourse of quality and control through standards (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005). Stressing the importance of teachers being aware of and responding to the five linguistic aspects is by the same token not the same as advocating an early learning approach over a tradition inspired more by social pedagogy (OECD, 2001; 2006). The indicators should merely be seen as an inspiration when discussing what to look for when trying to conjure up early literacy in broad and holistic ways.
Indicators are already and always installed in the normative machine we call pedagogic practice. A bit of elaboration: To claim a practice of indicator-free early literacy teaching, is in fact to claim a practice of tacit or hidden indicators. Pedagogy is always about something, and is always inscribed in values and relations of power (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2007). Tacit literacy theory (Gee, 2008) generates tacit (and often common-sense) literacy indicators. Tacit conceptions of early literacy, and of how early literacy manifests itself as practices in early childhood settings, are in no way better than open and visible ones. Articulating a list of indicators means—at the very least—to put the inescapable normative aspect of this method out in the open, where it should be subject to being challenged and constantly reworked.

3.7 Summary of the indicator driven EASE-adaptation

To recapture the EASE adaptation of the learning story approach: We have tried to hybridize the socio-cultural, holistic traditions of Carr’s (2005) approach and the strengths of indicators—indicators that we have derived from a complex theoretical field of socio-cultural early literacy. The result is a pretty traditional learning story template, with preset boxes for the story, photos, analysis and notes on possible follow-up activities. The early literacy and context indicators are on a separate hand-out to be used either as observation assistant or as a tool for the analysis of the learning stories of the day. The hand-outs are the teacher’s companions in the midst of the action of the actual classroom setting, and can be called upon afterwards as a tool for the analysis of the learning stories captured. And because we have the indicators out in the open, they are open for critique and revisions, making it possible for a group of teachers to discuss what a socio cultural approach to early literacy might mean to them—in that particular setting, at that particular time, and so on.

To conclude on the indicators: Indicators are an inevitable part of pedagogic practice: If they are not visible and accessible on a list, they are still in operation—in tacit ways inside the heads of the teachers. This way the danger does not lie in lists of indicators, it lies in the politics of early childhood education: Are indicators narrow and static, being forced upon teachers and children, or are indicators broad, flexible and provisional, always subject to being challenged and reworked by the people involved in early childhood education at all levels? If the latter is the case, indicators can enrich the pedagogic practice in the ways I have touched upon here.

To exemplify how to use the EASE adaptation of the learning story approach in order to create early literacy stories, we briefly discuss an original literacy story from the EASE project.

3.8 Creating an Early Literacy Story: The Story about a Thief

The following case is taken from a pre-school-class (first year in primary school), in an urban setting.

It is lunchtime, and the children are seated while eating. Thomas has already finished his meal, and he wants to read a story aloud to his classmates. Thomas picks up a book from the ‘book basket’. The book contains pictures and simple text, and it’s a story he knows already. It’s easy to see the excitement in Thomas’ face: He is looking forward to sharing the action-packed tale of The Thief! Thomas starts to read aloud, but suddenly he becomes aware of the audience (his classmates), who have all turned towards him on their chairs while
quietly munching on their lunches. This sudden awareness of the audience clearly makes Thomas nervous, and he’s having trouble focusing on decoding the text. But he won’t give up. Thomas ‘reads’ the rest of the story using his prior knowledge of the story, his imagination and the pictures on the pages (which he from time to time pauses to show underway). In the end, it turns out to be a really exciting story, where Thomas, on the spot, narrates the ‘truck’, the ‘loot’, the ‘house in need of fixing’ and other elements of the story in a somewhat new way. His classmates obviously enjoy the story, and applaud at the end.

The above text is a slightly modified version of the content of ‘The Story’ box on a literacy story template capturing Thomas as a reader of books. To attune ourselves to the rich early literacy potential of the event, we could interpret the event using the early literacy indicators, which might produce the following text in the ‘What Happened?’ box of the template:

Thomas is telling a partly made up story, he is ‘playreading’ and is aware of the direction of reading Danish (left-right). Thomas has heard the story before, so he is recounting it to some extent. Thomas shows an interest in books, is aware of the narrative structure (plot, beginning-middle/break-end, etc.) and is able to ‘read’ the pictures, thereby deriving/constructing meaning from symbols.

The above interpretation is trying to take Thomas’ early literacy event into the rich universe of socio-cultural early literacy theory. As an absolute minimum, this interpretation is claiming that there is more to this event than Thomas demonstrating a lack of formal decoding skills halfway into the story, as he is abandoning the decoding of words in favour of other strategies of producing meaning/a great story. With socio-cultural early literacy theory, we are able to see and act on a whole range of more or less rudimentary dispositions, skills and motivations related to early literacy and Thomas’ construction of an identity as ‘one of those’ who reads ‘these books’ in ‘this kind of way’ (Gee, 2002; 2008).

To see how each of the above early literacy stories looks on the literacy story template, please refer to the EASE homepage where pdf-versions are available for download.

3.9 Conclusion

Bruner (1996) considers that, in the interest of society, all pedagogical activities in pre-school and school should be devoted to providing opportunities for children to acquaint themselves with and become able to use the cultural “tool-box” that has been developed for learning and the creation of meaning. He points out that you have to be alert and review goals in curricula and syllabuses and the prevailing climate in learning environments to make sure that the cultural values embedded therein do not undermine children’s and pupils’ self-esteem. The most important task of the teacher in pre-school when encountering children is to draw their attention to the object of learning. The objects of learning are set out in the curriculum. What is considered important knowledge is shown in the way the environment is organised in pre-school, and any decisions in this respect affect children’s learning (Pramling Samuelsson & Asplund Carlsson, 2003; Bjervås, 2003). The fact that the competence of the teacher determines how well the intentions of the curriculum are realised has been confirmed by Alvestad (2001). Any evaluation of the goals of the curriculum should focus on the knowledge of the teachers and their strategies for children’s learning rather than on children’s individual learning (Kliw Sheridan, 2001; Johansson
& Pramling Samuelsson, 2003). Gustafsson and Myrberg (2002) also claim that the competence of the teacher is the single most important factor contributing to pupils’ results in school. What characterises the successful teacher is the use of a variety of teaching methods and high expectations of the children’s learning.
Observing, Supporting and Challenging Children’s Learning

by Ingrid Pramling Samuelsson

4.1 Abstract

New theories have led us to focus on children’s perspectives when observing, supporting and challenging their learning in the education processes of the early years. A competent child who can make sense of the world around him/her will then appear. The distinction between child perspectives and children’s perspectives, as well as a conception of development as increased discernment has become central in Early Childhood Education. This chapter also illustrates examples on how the teacher is trying to provide opportunities for the child to develop his/her knowledge and how the child responds to these opportunities. In the tradition of Vygotsky (1978) and development pedagogy (Pramling Samuelsson & Asplund Carlsson, 2007) development is seen as driven by pedagogical actions. Communication and interaction become key-factors and important tools for the teacher.

4.2 Introduction

Today it is generally accepted within ECE that the learning paradigm has changed dramatically. This may be ascribed to research findings and the development of theories within the fields of childhood sociology (James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998), childhood psychology (Hundeide, 2006; Sommer, 2005d; b), and early childhood education (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999; Pramling Samuelsson & Asplund Carlsson, 2008). The change mainly concerns viewing children as competent and resourceful social individuals with the right to be listened to and respected. This has led to focusing on children’s perspectives when observing, supporting and challenging children’s learning. It also means that children’s knowledge and skills cannot be evaluated and related to a specific level of development. Some reasons for this are:
• A changed perspective of knowledge, from knowledge as a question of quantity (knowing more or less) to knowledge as a question of quality, which means the ability to cooperate with others in new ways or to develop a more nuanced understanding of something.

• To acknowledge meaning-making as a social process that is communicative by nature.

• To recognize knowledge as subjective and as a process of discerning aspects of phenomena of relevance to different activities.

• Difficulties children experience in tests are more often of a communicative nature than a cognitive nature, which means that children and adults have different perspectives, and that children do not have a fair chance to express their knowledge.

• Instead, the understanding of the teacher and the understanding of the child have to be negotiated and coordinated. (Pramling Samuelsson & Pramling, 2009, p. 38)

4.3 Children’s perspectives

Since child perspectives and children’s perspectives are often mixed in different theories, we want to say a few words about the differences between these terms. If we take the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child as a starting point, there is support for both perspectives.

First, let us look at child perspectives, which imply taking into consideration what is best for each child. Based on our knowledge of children in general as well as of the particular child, we adults claim that something is best for the child under specific circumstances. This can be seen as child centeredness, a notion frequently used in ECE. What is it then that we observe, from this point of view? How do we support or challenge children? I would guess we do not challenge children, but provide opportunities for learning, believing that they will learn something. Children learn by doing when they are mature enough.

In contrast to this, children’s perspectives imply that the children themselves are active and express their views (orally or non-verbally), for example, when creating a literacy environment in pre-school. In this way, children’s wishes, ideas and perspectives contribute to the shaping of the environment. They may want to create a specific story-telling room etc. Children’s ways of experiencing their surroundings will then be important in the pedagogical context, enabling the teacher both to understand the child’s world and to influence and challenge each child.

In order to be able to understand the children’s world, adults are required to listen to the children (Rinaldi, 2009) and to join them in dialogues and interactions (Pramling Samuelsson & Sheridan, 2003). As a teacher, you have to first ask yourself how children make sense of different aspects of the world around them. Then the child needs to be challenged to take new steps in the learning process. On the one hand, it is self-evident that teachers need to listen to children in ECE, on the other hand, research shows that the time teachers spend listening to children and having dialogues with them is only 50% of the time of communication (Siraj-Blatchford, 2007). A prerequisite for becoming involved in dialogues with young children is the skill to listen to them and make them feel that you want to listen to their ideas (Doverborg & Pramling Samuelsson, 2000). This requires an effort from the teacher, as the act of listening and interpreting demands that he or she has experience of taking the children’s perspectives. When a teacher takes the child’s perspective, he or she is made aware of the child’s understanding, as the child’s meaning-making is expressed in the child’s perspective (Sommer, Pramling Samuelsson, &
CHAPTER 4. OBSERVING, SUPPORTING AND CHALLENGING CHILDREN’S LEARNING

In other words, being able to take children’s perspectives is a vital professional skill that teachers within ECE need to develop.

4.4 Development as increased discernment

Within the field of development psychology, there are very few studies of development as such. Rather, tests have been conducted before and after a certain intervention or time, and when a change is recorded, it is taken for granted that the child has learnt something. From a pedagogical point of view, however, it is less interesting whether a child can answer a question correctly or not than to make children’s reasoning visible, as an expression of development. Here is an opportunity to understand children’s perspectives through the content they are learning about. The teacher must continuously ask him- or herself what the problem is from the child’s perspective, or what the problem the child is trying to solve is (Hundeide, 2006). That is why children’s perspectives are so central in pedagogy.

When learning as a process is being studied, we have to ask ourselves: 1) Which knowledge is the teacher (or other children) trying to develop the child’s knowledge about? 2) How does the child respond in the specific learning situation? Perceived in this way, development is a social and communicative process. What a child can learn is related to the scaffolding he or she is provided with as a communicative frame or contract established between the participants (Hundeide, 2006). This leads to the most important question for the pedagogical practice—the teacher’s role and how he or she provides children with opportunities to develop new insights. In order to achieve this, teachers must see to it that their work is guided by observations and documentation based on this perspective.

As stated earlier, in this project learning is a question of discerning something (Pramling Samuelsson & Pramling, 2008). Something must then appear as a “figure”, that is, as something special. If we take an aspect of literacy, rhyme, as described in Pramling et al. (2009, pp. 130–131), we can see that children discern what rhyme is in three different ways:

These brief excerpts can also be seen as points in the development of the ability to rhyme. In the transcript, words in italics rhyme (in the original language if not always in the English translation), and words underlined are not actual but made-up words. Which different aspects of what constitutes a rhyme have the children discerned in the three verbal exchanges that follow? The teacher and a small group of children are sitting in a circle on the floor:

Teacher: Yes, anything else that rhymes then?

[...]

Fredrika: Shoe foot.

Teacher: Shoe foot, well, one could have the foot in a shoe, that’s right, but not quite that it rhymes exactly.

Fredrika has not yet learned what a rhyme is. Instead of the sounding aspect, she attends to the meaning of the words, i.e. that they are associated with one another (shoe and foot). However, she has discerned one fundamental aspect of what makes a rhyme a rhyme. She connects two words, she does not point to the object referred to by the initial word. Hence, she has discerned that rhyme is a relation between words, not between word and world.

Teacher: Did you think about something, that when they..., in the verses, that it swung and sung.
CHAPTER 4. OBSERVING, SUPPORTING AND CHALLENGING CHILDREN’S LEARNING

Malin: It rhymes.
Teacher: Yes, hear and
Malin: Ear.
Teacher: Ear. It rhymes as you said, Malin, it does.

In addition to the aspect of rhyme discerned in the first excerpt, Malin has also discerned that rhyming builds upon the sound of the ending of words. It is interesting to note that she still uses words that are also related in meaning (hear and ear).

Partik: Blot, blo.
Teacher: Blo, shoe yes.
Sven: Eh, cow, plow.
Teacher: Cow flo.
Sven: Gro flo.
Teacher: And gro flo.

In this excerpt, the sound relationship between words has clearly been distinguished from the meaning relationship. The children make up nonsense words (sounds, not actual words). In this excerpt, they have discerned that rhyming is independent of meaning or sense. In sequence, these three excerpts illustrate a progression in the ability to rhyme that is present at the same time in the group of children. In this way, the concept of ‘discernment’ of ‘critical features or aspects’ of a ‘learning object’ Marton & Tsui (2004), i.e., the capability or insight the teacher wants to develop in children, can help clarify in detail what children need to find out, and what teachers can help children become aware of, in order to develop their ability to rhyme. Meta-communicative dialogues (Pramling, 1996), i.e. in which the children discuss their own learning with their teacher, could be used to establish the variation in the aspects discerned within the group of children at a point in time. This would make the children aware of what they do when they rhyme. This variety of understanding what rhymes are about and how they are used could be used as stepping-stones in a developmental pedagogy (see Pramling Samuelsson & Asplund Carlsson, 2008).

In our project development is a question of discerning aspects of languages. Here the child’s perspective will once again become visible, as the aspect discerned is the meaning the children express. Thus, learning is a process of discernment shaped in children’s talking or acting around the content they are supposed to be learning about.

Let us look at one more example of literacy related to making poetry, something young children can get very fond of. Pramling claims that one of the challenges children face when introduced to poetic language is what similes mean in this context, particularly unconventional similes as found in much poetry. The following excerpt exemplifies some of the utterances made by the children (three-year-olds) when giving suggestions about what to include in a collaborative poem (from Pramling, 2009, p. 385)

An elephant is like a large elephant
A stone is like a crisp-shell [Swedish: knäckskal]

In the first case, like does not fill any function. In order for something to be ‘as’ or ‘like’ something else, the two ‘things’ related in this way need to be different things. In the second
the child manages this relationship. It is also notable that in line two, one of the children constructs a neologism (i.e., creates a new word) in knäckskal. This word-combination is highly ambiguous and not directly translatable. The word knäck can mean ‘crisp’ and ‘crack(ed)’ but it is also the name of a traditional toffee (consisting of syrup, sugar and cream) made at Christmas time. The translation chosen preserves the important sounding qualities of the expression if not the connotative ones. It is also possible that this neologism is due to the child having misheard and/or is mispronouncing the similar word snäckskal [snail shell]. Another example of the difficulty of simile from the data is ‘a lizard is like a green lizard’ (said by a three-year-old). Rather than directly introducing similes, young children could be encouraged to tell how something appears and sounds to them and what it does. How a particular feature of something can be made visible by comparing it to something else could be introduced at a later stage in the learning of poetry.

We have now seen two examples from the field of literacy, where children’s perspectives, their experience of the world around them, have become visible through observations. In this perspective, it is not only a question of observing with the senses of seeing, hearing and smelling, but also of observing the child’s body language and noting what he or she expresses verbally. It is also vital to interpret these observations with an open mind.

4.5 Discussion

In this article we have mainly focused on teacher’s possibilities of observing, supporting and challenging children’s perspectives as cornerstones in the development of children’s understanding of different aspects of the world around them. In the tradition of Vygotsky (1978) as well as in development pedagogy (Pramling Samuelsson & Asplund Carlsson, 2007), development is driven by pedagogical actions. Instead of seeing development as a question of maturity, Pramling Samuelsson and Asplund Carlsson discern development in the interaction between the child and other children or the teacher.

An important tool for teachers to use is asking questions. This is important, not only for getting access to the child’s reasoning, but also for supporting and challenging the child’s learning. This is an unusual way of thinking compared with traditional school practice, in which teachers often ask questions to find out if the child knows something or not. Dahlberg and Lenz Taguchi (1994) have shown that the traditional school approach is as usual in pre-school as in school. What then are the key factors in the approach we are talking about here? One key factor is the teacher’s knowledge about the content children are supposed to be learning about. In our project, it is literacy (Gustafsson & Mellgren, 2005). A second one is the perspective of learning as creation of meaning and discernment. A third one is related to communication, interaction and dialogues with children. A fourth is the ability to observe, interpret and use this knowledge in everyday life with children.

In pedagogy in which the intention is to make children literate, the teacher must know what notions, features, ideas, children need to develop an understanding about, and challenge children in this direction through directing their attention towards these aspects (Sheridan, Pramling Samulesson, & Johansson, 2009).

Content in literacy, apart from language practice and rich vocabulary, can comprise symbols of various kinds, awareness of language, the function of written text, ways of using the language (narration,
descriptions or argumentations), as well as being able to listen, ask questions and express one’s own ideas. As we saw earlier, the content can also refer to specific aspects as in rhymes and poetry, the surface of which we have only skimmed. However, whatever the content, the rule must be that any interaction in this area must take place at the crossroads between the teacher’s intention and each child’s perspective.
CHAPTER 5. A SEAMLESS TRANSITION OR AN OASIS TO REST IN?
THE CHILDREN’S PICTURES OF THE SWEDISH PRE-SCHOOL CLASS

A Seamless Transition or an Oasis to Rest In?
The Children’s Pictures of the Swedish Pre-School Class

by Helena Ackesjö

5.1 Abstract

In Sweden, children’s transition from pre-school to compulsory school is made through the pre-school class. This study aims to highlight this Swedish transition zone through the eyes of the children. What is being focused on in the pre-school class from the children’s point of view? The children have been painting pictures of their days in the pre-school class. The focus of analysis is what the children chose to highlight as central in the pedagogic practice. The pictures are therefore seen as communicative narratives. Through the pictures the children represent and communicate their experiences of the world. Ten pre-school classes participated in the study, and a total of 172 pictures were analyzed. Over half of the pictures showed playing children and included (free) play both indoors and outdoors, pictures that describe the pre-school class as an “oasis to rest in” between pre-school and school. Yet another extensive category was outlined, that showed different types of learning and education foremost in activities like circle time. The result shows that the pictures reflect the pre-school class as a playful child-centred educational practice at the crossroads between pre-school and compulsory school. My conclusion is that the pre-school class may be just a seamless transition from pre-school to compulsory school, with both “formal” schooling and playful learning.
thesis, which explores the teacher’s identities in the pre-school class (Ackesjö, 2010). The results showed that the teachers in pre-school class wanted to shelter this pedagogic practice from influences from compulsory school. They were also eager to mark some sort of differences between pre-school, pre-school class and compulsory school. These extracts show how this was made:

Helena: What do you do in pre-school class that the teachers in pre-school don’t?
Lena: Well, we work harder with the children’s social skills, because they [teachers in pre-school] are so focused on the children’s acquisitions of knowledge. And it feels as if it should be the other way around, that maybe we should work more with children’s learning... But our work is more to practice the social skills, to practice the children’s endurance... of course there should be knowledge acquisitions also and we do some letters and so.... But it feels as the demands, the demands on the children are higher in pre-school I think.

Helena: So, the pre-school class becomes a pause, an intermission...?
Laila: Yes...
Lena: The knowledge acquisitions is all that is in focus in pre-school nowadays, it feels as if it has become low status to say that care is included in the work.

Regina: The school has its schedule—“Today we are going to do Swedish assignments!” In the pre-school class, we also plan like this, “today it’s Wednesday and I’m going to work on the children’s language skills”. Though, we work with the Swedish language every day, but with more focus on Wednesdays. Then this happens, like for me today; when we were done we had been working with mathematics instead. We have this freedom! To be able to choose! /—/ We can allow us to follow the children’s turns during the day.
Rosita: Maybe the teachers in school can’t do that. I think that is a big difference. We have a bigger opportunity to be flexible.

Lena: And I think we have the whole progress of the children in mind, teachers in school have more focus on learning and we know that the whole person is important for children to be able to go a step further.

(Extracts from Ackesjö, script)

It seems as if these teachers wanted to mark differences in contents between pre-school class and pre-school ("The knowledge acquisitions is all that is in focus in pre-school nowadays") and differences in methods ("We have a bigger opportunity to be flexible") between pre-school class and compulsory school.

In Sweden, a discussion about the pre-school class is escalating, with focus on learning and assessments. While the government wants to make learning and knowledge acquisitions in pre-school class more visible, the teachers seem to be more eager to make the transition from pre-school to compulsory school via the pre-school class rather stress-free for the children, with a lot of free play in focus (Ackesjö, 2010). The question is how the children experience the activities in the pre-school class? My intent of this study is to give a brief view of the children’s perceptions of the pre-school class activities. What is focused on in the pre-school class from the children’s point of view?
CHAPTER 5. A SEAMLESS TRANSITION OR AN OASIS TO REST IN? 
THE CHILDREN’S PICTURES OF THE SWEDISH PRE-SCHOOL CLASS

Previous research and evaluations of the Swedish pre-school class (eg. Munkhammar, 2001; Davids- 
son, 2002; Swedish Agency for School Improvement, 2004; Swedish National Agency for Education, 2006; 
Karlsson, Melander, Prieto, & Sahlström, 2006; Ackesjö, 2010) is conducted by interviewing teachers, 
by observing the teachers and children in pre-school class activities, or by highlighting the differences 
and similarities between different types of school forms. In contrast to that approach, only a few studies 
have been carried out where children in pre-school class have had their say, and then always in relation 
to other contexts or school forms. This constructs a gap of knowledge. Children’s voices, their experi-
ences about the activities in pre-school class seen as a transition zone between pre-school and school, 
need to be heard. In this article I present the children’s view of what content they feel they are offered in 
pre-school class. The focus of analysis is what the children chose to highlight as central in the pedagogic 
practice.

5.2 The Swedish pre-school class—a new arena?

The pre-school class is an activity that has been created through an educational reform in the late 1990s 
with the purpose of constructing a bridge between pre-school and compulsory education. The two insti-
tutions together would create a “new pedagogy” that would be fruitful for the activities of a pre-school 
class (Swedish Agency for School Improvement, 2004). The pre-school class is included in the curriculum 
for the compulsory school with the exception that it doesn’t have to achieve the goals in the curriculum. 
This means that pre-school class only has goals to strive for, as in pre-school. The reform stated that 
the activities in a pre-school class shouldn’t be school activities, but also not mere pre-school activities. 
Therefore, one could say that a new arena has arisen between pre-school and primary school (Swedish 
Agency for School Improvement, 2006). In my licentiate thesis (Ackesjö, 2010), I study teachers’ iden-
tities in pre-school class and I theoretically place the pre-school class at the crossroad of pre-school and 
school. I use the term borderland to enhance “the place in between” pre-school and compulsory school. 
In this borderland teachers should create a meaningful and effective pedagogic practice.

According to the Swedish Agency for School Improvement (2004; 2006) the pre-school class ought to 
be seen as an important transition zone, in which the children should be given opportunities to prepare 
for meeting with the compulsory schools’ demands on skills and knowledge, in a playful way. This is 
even more enhanced by the government’s construction of the pre-school class as a voluntarily pedagogic 
activity for the six year old children. In other Nordic countries, the activities for the six year old children 
have been managed in different ways. By the educational reform in Norway 1997, Germeten (2002) states 
that the six year old children were moved from the voluntary pre-school to compulsory school, from a 
voluntary arena of free play to an arena with discipline and control. In Denmark, the same movement 
was made 2009 as the activities for the six year old children became a part of the Danish compulsory 
school.

5.3 Theoretical and methodical framework

In the study, childhood sociologies are used as a theoretical framework, which means that I see the 
children as actors in their own life. The child is seen as an individual who collectively and actively 
builds his/her own culture and relationships. Children are active participants, they should be listened 
to and have a major place in the community (James, 1997; Lee, 2001; Hallidén, 2007). Corsaro (2005)
suggests that we should leave the perception of children as marginalized, and instead see them as active and participating in both children’s and adult’s cultures. This would give us methodologically a good foundation in research that will focus on and highlight the children’s everyday lives.

For a long time children have been positioned as passive in research, in that they have not been given opportunity to contribute with stories from their positions (Veale, 2005). Even if we listen to children, adults have a tradition not to hear them (Roberts, 2002). The children in this study are seen as active and participatory, and not merely as passive recipients of adult actions. To be able to, via the children’s eyes, highlight the content in pre-school class, the children have been painting pictures of their days in the pre-school class. The starting point has been that children communicate what is important to them in their social and cultural practice. The children also commented on the pictures verbally to clarify the content. The children’s comments together with the pictures, construct the empiric foundation for this summary of the children’s views of the pre-school class.

Children and teachers in ten pre-school classes participated in the study. The teachers conducted the data collection in their own classes, following a given manual (enclosed in appendix A.1). The manual was constructed to ensure that all teachers would present the task in a similar manner to the children, and also to enable comparison of the pictures. The children painted pictures in the winter and early spring of the year in which they participated in pre-school class. This timing meant that the children had a good experience of the activities because they had been participating in pre-school class for 6–9 months. A total of 172 pictures were included in the study and the pictures were analyzed by studying the content of what children are presenting. (Some of the pictures and the children’s comments are enclosed in appendix B.1)

The pictures might give us contextual clues about the pre-school class, clues of how children perceive the activities as well as clues about the structure of the pre-school class. Connections are here made to James and Prout (1997); by studying children’s pictures of the pedagogical activities, knowledge can be gained about the structure and children’s action in activities, and how children’s actions are challenging the structure and how the structure prevents or allows the child’s action.

The pictures in this study are seen as communicative narratives. The use of children’s pictures as communication is inspired by Kress (1997). The six year old children in the pre-school class have not yet received “formal” reading and writing education, and many of the children have not yet conquered the written language. Image-building is a medium close to the children’s experience of the world, and through the pictures we can, according to Kress (Kress, 1997), reach the children’s meaning making. According to Kress (1997), the pictures are included in the concept of literacy. Through the pictures the children represent and communicate their experiences of the world. The visual aspect of literacy, children’s pictures, is an understated and relatively un-researched area. The images are one media the children use to communicate their experiences and to make their voices heard. The concept of literacy needs therefore to be expanded, to contain all sorts of media competence, more competences than just writing (Kress, 1997). In this study I use Barton’s (1994) definition of literacy which states that literacy is a way of symbolically defining the world. It’s a part of our ways of thinking, and it’s a goal to communicate something to others.

The pictures could also be seen as literacy events, according to Heath (1999). Even if Marsh (2004) means that we cannot talk about children as pre-readers or pre-writers, since they are already in the middle of this learning process from birth, I think that the concept of pre-writers can be a way to delimit the children in pre-school/pre-school class from children in compulsory school. In this study the information
the children communicate to us is seen as pre-writing in my definition; written communication prior to
the children’s mastering of the formal written language. This means that I see children as literate even
if they do not have conquered the written language, since they communicate their stories through their
pictures.

Nevertheless, we have to challenge this method of research. The children’s pictures cannot be seen
as some kind of “truth” that can be generalized. My aim is to briefly summarize the pictures, which
can give us clues of how the children are experiencing the pre-school class. First, we have to bear in
mind that the children may have drawn some sort of “wishful pictures”; pictures which may represent
activities they wish were a part of the pre-school class. Second, the children’s comments to their pictures
were written down by the teachers. We do not know how this was made, and if the teachers altered the
children’s comments in any way. Third, my way of dividing the pictures into categories can be discussed.
Other researchers may conduct this categorization in other ways. My categories can be, and have been,
discussed, challenged and revised by other researchers.

5.4 Findings

The analysis generated five categories. Each category shows different images of the activities in the pre-
school class. In this empirical section, I will give a summary of the variation in the children’s pictures.
The outlined categories are

- Play indoors and outdoors
- Education in several subjects and themes, indoors and outdoors
- Circle time
- Collaboration with other grades
- School routines (no activities, only descriptions of routines)

Over half of the pictures show playing children and include (free) play both indoors and outdoors. Another extensive category is outlined from the pictures that show different types of learning and edu-
cation; in circle time or in education of different subjects such as Swedish, mathematics, environmental
issues, sports etc. In the following, the analysis will be focused on the three first and most extensive
categories; play, education and circle time. (For examples of pictures and comments, see appendix B.1)

Play indoors and outdoors

Within the category of play, the children describe their play both indoors and outdoors. The children’s
descriptions range from playing football, climbing trees and swinging outdoors to building with Lego
and Kapla sticks or play house indoors. At first, all the pictures of play seem to describe what we could
call children’s free play; activities that the children chose by themselves. No adults are drawn in these
pictures, which could support the fact that the activities are child-centred and maybe child-chosen ac-
tivities.
Circle time

Several pictures describe circle time situations. The category known as circle time contains pictures that in different ways show the contents of the circle time which is recurring in pre-school class almost every day. According to the children’s comments, they discuss ethical issues and value issues in the circle time. Some of the children’s pictures and comments also imply that the circle time can be a place for education in language and mathematics. What dominates the circle time in the children’s pictures seems to be the moment of “eating fruit and reading stories”. The pictures are telling us about the education in pre-school class, since the circle time can be seen as a method of teaching. Even so, I choose to give these pictures an individual category, since the children so clearly showed in their pictures and comments that the purpose with the pictures was to highlight the circle time as a specific activity.

Teaching indoors and outdoors

Within the category listed as teaching indoors and outdoors the children describe different forms of teacher-guided situations. The pictures and the comments show how they sit in benches or at tables and are working with books in which they are supposed to fill in letters and numbers. In the pictures of outdoor teaching, the children describe situations in which they go to the woods and are taught in flora and fauna, or locate branches with shapes of letters. Within the category, the children’s stories mainly describe the teaching of the Swedish language (reading and writing) even if pictures of mathematics, science, physical education and teacher-guided creative activities also occur.

5.5 Analyzing dilemmas

The question is what we possibly see in the children’s pictures. Despite the fact that the pre-school class is a school form, it’s remarkable that so many children choose to omit “formal school activities” in their pictures. On the other hand it might be argued that all pictures in some form express the children’s experiences of the pre-school class. Their representations in the pictures can be seen as the children’s interpretations of the activities. The children’s representations and interpretations are situated, and the children’s knowledge about the pre-school class is produced through their experiences (Skeggs, 1997). This means that even if the children draw an activity that we refer to as free play, this activity could be a representation of an advanced laboratory work in mathematics. It is all about interpretations.

Let me give some examples of difficulties in analyzing the pictures. In the category of play, we can’t tell from the pictures if the activities are chosen by the child itself, or if the building of the three Kapla-towers in different heights is a result of a lesson in mathematics. We can’t be sure that the pictures omit “formal teaching”; in fact it may be the teaching process the children are representing in their pictures.

Even the category of circle time has to be discussed. This category is large, which may be because the circle time is an activity that the children recognize and that they have extensive experience with from pre-school. It is an activity close to the children’s experiences; an activity which they know and can understand the content of, and therefore is easy to recognize and describe. One can also interpret these pictures of the circle time as the children’s understanding of the pre-school traditions and cultures influencing the pre-school class activities; the circle time is an activity which has a strong position in pre-school and is a moment where teachers can educate children in a perhaps less formal manner without bringing the children into school benches. I choose to separate the pictures of the circle time from the
CHAPTER 5. A SEAMLESS TRANSITION OR AN OASIS TO REST IN?
THE CHILDREN’S PICTURES OF THE SWEDISH PRE-SCHOOL CLASS

category of teaching, because the children so clearly showed in their pictures and comments that the purpose with the pictures was to highlight the circle time as a specific activity. But of course, the circle time can also be seen as a form of teaching. In the circle time, the teachers have an opportunity to discuss different subjects and relate them to the children’s experiences, and to read and sing and so on.

5.6 The pre-school class as a seamless transition?

Could the pre-school class be seen as a seamless transition from pre-school to compulsory school? Teachers in pre-school class tend to mark that education and teaching in pre-school class is made in a partially “different” way than at school, even if it is in the same subject areas (cf. Ackesjö, 2010; Germeten 2002).

Based on the children’s pictures and their comments one can say that the children’s play has been given much space in pre-school class activities. On the other hand, the pictures are not stressing learning and teaching to the same extent. Within the category of teaching indoors and outdoors, parallels from the children’s pictures can be drawn to the school’s teaching culture; it is within this category that children most clearly describe the school’s cultural influences on the pre-school class. However, the category is relatively small.

I do believe that pre-school class activities are much more complex than “just” (free) play. My conversations with teachers in pre-school testify to significant projects in mathematics, Swedish language and environmental issues that are planned for and implemented over shorter or longer periods of time. In these projects, the children are involved in both planning and implementation, and they seem to learn a lot. Most children learn to read and write during the year in pre-school class. They meet and learn the mathematical language in a playful and natural way; bar charts are made out of lost teeth and collected tea light cups. The children learn about the flora and fauna, species and types (Ackesjö, 2010). One can suppose that the children participating in the activities are aware of the fact that the pre-school class indeed is a school form, or at least, that they have left the pre-school for a different pedagogic activity. Given that, it is surprising to see the vast amount of pictures with playing children, and that they chose to omit the “school-like” educational activities in their pictures. Does this tell us something about this pedagogic practice, or does this tell us more about how children chose to paint pictures?

One possible conclusion that could be drawn is that the adult-led teaching is no dominant element in pre-school class activity from the children’s perspectives. Although, this doesn’t mean that adult-led teaching doesn’t exist. But from the perspectives of the children’s pictures, the teaching in pre-school class may come in other forms. One of these forms of teaching may be what the children show us in their pictures, which are pictures of playing and learning children. Given these findings, maybe the pre-school class constructs a seamless transition from pre-school to compulsory school, with playing and learning woven together and where the teachers educate the children according to the children’s interests and cultures.

5.7 …or an oasis to rest in?

The children’s descriptions of the pre-school class can also be likened to what Prout (2005) calls the “innocent children’s social limbo” or “secret gardens” (op. cit, p. 11). Does the pre-school class activities foremost consist of (free) play (as the children’s pictures show), which contribute to the fact that this
school form can be seen as a secret garden or oasis for the children to rest in between the more knowledge-based pre-school and compulsory school? This is what the teachers stressed (Ackesjö, 2010). If the children in their pictures generally describe their own child-centred cultures in pre-school class, cultures permeated by free play and a free childhood, one question could be why formal education is not emphasized by the teachers?

The fact that the pedagogical activities for the six year old children in Sweden were carried out in a crowded classroom at school, contributed to a minimal amount of space for the children’s play and lively movements. This made it important for the teachers to find new ways to adopt the activities in pre-school class (Persson & Wiklund, 2008). Therefore, it is interesting to consider why the teaching is almost not visible in the children’s pictures. Are the teachers, so to speak, teaching “on the fly”? One way of discussing the teacher’s role in the pre-school class, is to question the teacher’s balancing act between autonomy and formal goals of the school system; their apparent struggle between educating the children and encouraging the children’s free play (cf. Sheridan & Pramling Samuelsson, 2009). From the children’s perspective, their own free play is playing the most significant role in the pre-school class. The use of the free play in the education may be a conscious act of the teachers, and a way to make the transition easy and relaxed for the children.

As previously stated, teachers in pre-school class seem to be keen on not to teach in a formal “school-like” manner (Ackesjö, 2010; Germeten, 2002). Will this effort result in teaching conducted in pre-school class passing the children unnoticed? Could one result of the teachers’ aspirations, which is to make the pre-school class a seamless transition by weaving (free) play as a central part into the teaching of mathematics and language, be that the children interpret these activities as just a game? Through the children’s joint actions and activities in the pre-school class, they interpret and alter the social order in the pedagogic practice. Since the teachers are not “doing school” in the pre-school class, the children also may respond by not “doing school”. This can construct the pre-school class to an oasis to rest in, where the children can be at ease, and play and learn in their own time.

5.8 The children’s pictures as literacy events

The results require the choice of methods to be discussed. I had probably received other responses from the children if I had conducted interviews, and if I had asked them to tell different learning situations in the pre-school class. At the same time, children’s pictures can give clues to what the children think is crucial, when adults do not affect them with questions as in an interview. I choose to see the pictures as communicative narratives and as literacy events, which are here placed on an equal footing with the written language. The children are communicating their stories through their pictures, and by using a broader literacy concept, the pictures are seen as literacy events according to Kress (1997) and Heath (1999). The children’s experiences are situated in and processed through the practice in pre-school class, and the pictures are seen as representations of the children’s interpretations of these experiences. The children’s interpretations and representations are based on the children’s prior frameworks, and are recognized through the children’s understanding, naming and marking of the events in their pictures. The pictures therefore give us clues to the children’s knowledge about the practice although this knowledge is always changing, forming and moving. They use their pictures to tell us their stories about the practice; stories from their positions, processed through their experiences, via a well known language. According to the teachers they were taking an interest in the pictures, they were involved in the making and they
were taking responsibility in the picture’s communicative ambition. In this representative process, the pictures become literacy events and the picture making becomes a mediated action in which the children are expressing their interpretations of the practice.

5.9 Concluding remarks

The children’s pictures give us clues about what is central in the pre-school class from the children’s perspectives. Therefore, it is interesting to consider how it could be that children’s play and their self-selected activities have such an impact in the children’s pictures. One reason may be that the free play is central for the children, and the play takes up a large part of children’s waking hours. The play is what gives the children meaning and nourishment, and is also the platform on which they can process their daily experiences. Given this, it may seem quite natural that the (free) play appears so frequently in the pictures. But on the other hand—can the children’s pictures also show that the children experience a lack of clarity in the educational activities? Maybe the children do not really appreciate or see this school form as an arena for learning and education. The compulsory school in Sweden does not begin until children are seven years old, and from that perspective it is perhaps encouraging that the children seem to view the pre-school class as a free and child-centred extension of pre-school. But then again; if the children do not pay attention to the school codes or school cultures in pre-school class, and do not notice that pre-school classes are not “just” pre-school, then what about the transition to compulsory school and the continuity between the different forms of schooling? Will the transition be seamless?

From this study, parallels can be drawn to the political debate about the Swedish pre-school class presented at the top of this article. While the Swedish government wants to make learning and knowledge acquisitions in pre-school class more visible by including achieving goals and assessments of learning, the teachers want to make the transition from pre-school to compulsory school soft, stress-free and comfortable for the children, with a lot of free play in focus and a lot of knowledge acquisitions in “different” forms than at school. Even if the teachers in pre-school class mark their differences to other school forms, my conclusion is that the pre-school class may be just a seamless transition from pre-school to compulsory school, with both “formal” schooling and playful learning.

Even if we don’t know much about the situations in which the pictures were made, the pictures reflect the children’s views of the pre-school class; a playful child-centred educational practice at the crossroads between pre-school and compulsory school.
A.1  Children’s pictures of the pre-school class

Children’s pictures can be a way to capture what happens in an educational activity. Often children are depicting their experiences in a “naked” manner. I want you to ask your pre-school class children to draw pictures of the activities, one picture or several pictures if they want. You are required to follow a manual for the collection of the pictures so that all of your images can be comparable in the study:

• Start by gathering all the children (in full or half classes).
• Conduct a discussion with the children where they can come up with their stories of what you usually do on a “normal day” in the pre-school class. Let the children come up with proposals that can inspire them in the drawing assignment. Emphasize that all answers can be right!
• Prepare the children with paper (A4-size) and crayons, so they can depict situations that they believe are central to the activities of this particular pre-school class.
• Ask the children to talk about what the pictures portray.
• Write the children’s words on the back of the pictures. Ask the children to be as detailed as possible in their descriptions.
• Do not write the children’s names, if they are boys or girls, or school’s name!

Before you perform the activity, you must give a letter to the parents, so that they can accept their children participating in the study. This letter is included in this envelope. Ask the parents to sign and return the letter to you.

After the activity, collect all images and send them to me in the enclosed envelope along with letters that the parents have signed. The pictures from those children who did not receive OK from their parents to participate in the study you keep yourself.

Thank you for your help!

Helena Ackesjö
B.1 Selected pictures and comments of play indoors

This is when I’m building with Kapla sticks.
We use to be in the building room, where I play with cars and Lego, and build spaceships.
I use to play with cars on the red carpet.
We use to play in the doll-room, we play mother father and child. Both mum and dad are cooking. The baby is asleep.
This is when my friend and I dress up as Jasmine. She is a princess from the stories.
This is when we have disco in the hall way. We dance and play and so on.
B.2 Selected pictures and comments of play outdoors

This is when I swing outside.
I and my friends have a secret hut in the bushes.
This is when we are sliding.
We are good bandy players. We use to play at the course outside the school.
This is when I’m building a sandcastle outdoors. I like to build things in the sand.
This is when we play football outside.
We use to play in the bushes.

B.3 Selected pictures and comments of circle time

We use to eat fruit and listen to a story.
This is when we have circle time. We have it every day. We eat fruit, and talk a bit. We count all the children and sing. It’s good to have circle time, because that’s when all the children are there.
This is when we have circle time. We are 15 children in our group. We talk about different things, like shapes, words letters. And we eat fruit.
When we have circle time, we use to play, listen to stories and eat fruit.
B.4 Selected pictures and comments of teaching

We do the ABC, we learn letters and the sign language.
This is when we learn stuff.
This is when the teacher tells us to do the Friday-book. So we do that. When we’re done, we can have free play.
You have to write and paint.
This is when we do homework.
This is when I do my ABC-book in the library.
6.1 Abstract

Within the EASE project one of the aims has been to ensure the inclusion of more marginalised children and their families. Children should be encouraged to reflect on their own learning process and empowered to become autonomous learners throughout life. In order to achieve these aims, respecting the rights of the child has been a starting point, as well as giving extra support to children’s homes and second and foreign language acquisition. In this chapter, the focus will be on children with another mother tongue than the majority language, taking a Swedish perspective.

6.2 Introduction

In the last few years Sweden has seen an important change in language choice within different areas due to increased internationalisation, and as of July 1, 2009, a new act established Swedish as the official language in Sweden (SOU, 2008, p. 26). Over 150 languages are spoken in Sweden, and a recurrent issue in the media concerns the achievements of multilingual children during their school years. A report presented by the Swedish National Agency for Education [Skolverket] (2008) shows that the academic performance of multilingual children ranks lower than that of their native Swedish counterparts. The question of support for multilingual children was raised in an NGO report by Rädda Barnen (2004) to the UN, and a concern was expressed regarding the children’s educational future.

The Article 29 in the UN Convention (1989) on the Rights of the Child states that the child has the right to his/her own cultural identity, language and values. This is the most internationally acclaimed document regarding children’s rights. In Sweden pre-school is mandatory, but it has its own curriculum
Children with a foreign background who develop their first language improve their prospects of learning Swedish as well as developing knowledge in other areas. The pre-school should help to ensure that children with a mother tongue other than Swedish, receive the opportunity to develop both their Swedish language and their mother tongue. (Ministry of Education and Research in Sweden, 2006, p. 7).

Research emphasises that the learning of new languages is facilitated if children have a well developed mother tongue (Hyltenstam, 1996; Thomas & Collier, 1997). Children who get to strengthen their language during their early years develop not only their spoken language but also their cultural ways of thinking (Skolverket, 2002).

6.3 Background

Sweden today is a multilingual country, and nearly 17 percent of pre-school children have another mother tongue than Swedish. The pre-school is a place where many children meet for the first time in larger, diverse groups and take their first steps towards an educational future. This leaves teachers with great responsibility for implementing the curriculum and working out how to make their pre-schools a socially inclusive arena for everyone (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon, & Walsh, 2004; Cannella, 1997). Documents in early childhood policy give children the right to their own cultural identity and language, although statistics for Sweden still show that only 17.8 percent of the children with another background than Swedish receive the mother tongue support that they are entitled to (Skolverket, 2009). According to the Swedish National Agency for Education (Skolverket, 2002), the general attitude among Swedish politicians is that they believe that teachers should concentrate on children learning the Swedish language. Many teachers and politicians talk about the importance of the mother tongue, but there is still a need for deeper understanding of why it is significant and how it can affect children’s educational future as well as their participation as citizens of a democracy. The ambivalent attitudes shown by the present Swedish government can create confusion among teachers working in different institutions. This leads us to question how the steering documents are being implemented, and more specifically, what the children perceive when it comes to their mother tongue in institutional settings?

6.4 Theoretical and methodical framework

This chapter is based on a study conducted by the author; parts of which were devoted to the EASE project. The aims of the study were twofold: first and foremost to get a deeper understanding of how multilingual children perceive the functions of their mother tongue and the majority language. Secondly, to explore what purpose these have for children in institutional settings when it comes to language and communication. The children in the study are viewed as active, constantly contributing to their own learning and being able to shape their own ways of understanding and using them to influence their surroundings (Hundeide, 2006; James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998; Pramling Samuelsson & Asplund Carlsson, 2003; Säljö, 2000; Sommer, 2005c). The theoretical starting points are found in the socio-cultural
perspective, and in the variation theory. They both underpin the environmental and social settings for learning. The variation theory is suitable when trying to understand how children perceive the phenomena in focus, and the socio-cultural perspectives underline that knowledge is co-constructed and shared between participants in a setting. From the socio-cultural perspective language is viewed as an individual and collective tool for thinking (Säljö, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978; 1986). The variation theory emphasizes perceiving as important, since how we perceive a phenomenon will affect how we act in different situations (Marton & Tsui, 2004). According to Marton and Booth (1997), this is the perspective of the learner, and the research object is the variation in the way that people experience phenomena.

The data represent the voices of eight multilingual children that were about to turn, or had recently turned, 6 years of age. All but one of the children (a girl) were developing their languages simultaneously. Data regarding the mother tongue were collected by participating in the children’s culture and writing field notes. Additionally, interviews were conducted with the children, and the field notes were used to facilitate the construction of the interview questions. As the study was an empirical study, visits were made to the pre-school once or twice a week over the space of 15 weeks. Each visit lasted from 1.5–2.5 hours. The analysis of the interviews was influenced by the phenomenographical perspective, i.e. patterns were sought in the variation of how children perceived the functions of their mother tongue in pre-school. During the entire research process the guidelines outlined by the Swedish Research Council [Vetenskapsrådet] were used (Vetenskapsrådet, 2009). The information collected was kept in a safe place, and the voice-recorded files were deleted after transcription. The names of all the children have been changed to similar cultural names, and the amount of information given about them is limited to protect their identities.

6.5 Findings

The results show that children perceive that there are differences with regard to when to use the mother tongue and when to use the majority language in institutional settings. The mother tongue could be used in various contexts, but not in pre-school. The children did state that they used the mother tongue in pre-school, although this only occurred in the absence of teachers and with the awareness that it might be unsuitable and associated with feelings of shyness. The official language, Swedish, is also the dominating majority language in pre-school and used in the communication with others. Unlike the mother tongue, there were no specific areas where one could not speak Swedish, and this indicates that children do use it more or less in all contexts they participate in.

When it came to the importance of speaking the mother tongue, the children emphasized the significance of culture, ethnic identity, and communication with others. They also drew attention to the importance of communicating with one’s family and peers and, using Gumperz’ (1982) term, speaking the mother tongue seemed related to social closeness. As for the importance of speaking Swedish, the children also pointed to the importance of social closeness (relations to peers), but this was overshadowed by the associations with being or becoming a member of society. Accordingly, reading and writing skills were outlined as a key factor for educational and societal success. Moreover, although reading and writing skills in the mother tongue were found important, these were nothing one needed to learn within the near future. While some children already viewed themselves as active citizens, others felt the importance of developing tools for becoming active members of society. The following excerpts will demonstrate how the children expressed this:
CHAPTER 6. “IN PRE-SCHOOL WE SPEAK SWEDISH.”
CHILDREN’S PERCEPTION OF MULTILINGUALISM

Excerpt 1 – The following excerpt is taken from the researcher’s (Hiba’s) field notes.

Nathalie  I have to learn how to write good Swedish because in school they will give you plenty of homework and I have to do well or the others will tease me.
Hiba    So reading and writing is good to learn because you want to be able to do your homework?
Nathalie Yes and if I want to have a driver’s license I need to know how and if I want to read all signs.
Hiba    What about Kurdish?
Nathalie Kurdish? When I grow up I will understand that, not now.

Excerpt 2 – From the interview with Ali.

Hiba   Do you remember when you drew the Iraqi flag?
Ali    Yes.
Hiba   How did you know what it said in Arabic?
Ali    My brother told me that, but I do not know how to write it.
Hiba   So why don’t you learn to?
Ali    I will later on.
Hiba   Later when?
Ali    When I am 20 years or older. In school you need to know how to write in Swedish and all the books are in Swedish, so I need to know that first. I already know how to read and write, but not that much.

Excerpt 3 – From the interview with Shirin.

Shirin  When I start class zero I will play a lot and then I will start in the ABCD school and that is when I need to write it all. That is when the teacher will tell you how good you are and if you are good you will write numbers and letters and everything and write.
Hibo    But you already know how to read and write?
Shirin  In school I will learn to become faster, I think.
Hiba    Do you know how to read and write in Kurdish?
Shirin  Oh no! Never ever, ever.
Hiba    Why not?
Shirin  Well you know what. Kurdish is not like, it is not like… Kurdish is written like Arabic, with the same letters, that is how it is and that will take you so many years to learn. Swedish is easier and more important to know in school.

All of the examples point to the importance of knowing how to read and write in Swedish in order to be an active member of society. By starting pre-school class the children feel a responsibility for learning how to read and write or, as Shirin put it, becoming faster at it.
6.6 Preschool’s important task as an institution in society

In view of the rapidly growing global culture, education is becoming increasingly important in our daily lives. Educational institutions have a powerful influence on deciding who is of cultural worth and define what learning is, which can lead to children being excluded Baker, Lynch, Cantillon, & Walsh (2004); Säljö (2000). Language attitudes in society will affect how language is approached and used in preschools. According to Cummins (2000) and Baker (2007), teachers can either reinforce these attitudes or deconstruct them. As the findings of the study show, Swedish is the institutional majority language and necessary to speak in order to understand others. In a setting like pre-school where many children come together, the majority language becomes the common language and is used to communicate with others. Having said this, we still need to reflect about children’s statements regarding feelings of shyness about using their mother tongue in pre-school. This indicates that children perceive their mother tongue as having a lower status and reinforcing the Swedish language as the valuable and ‘right’ one (Bourdieu, 1991; Haglund, 2002; Rhedding-Jones, 2001). Those with skills in their mother tongue do not always get the opportunity to express their knowledge and are silenced when the majority language is viewed as the ‘right’ language (Rhedding-Jones, 2001).

6.7 Being a member of society

When it came to speaking the Swedish language, many of the children declared that it was important to be an active member of society. Reading and writing skills were spoken of as key tools for an educational future and active participation in Swedish society. For these reasons, it was crucial for the children to develop their reading and writing skills in Swedish. Cannella and Viruru (2001) mention that the ‘right’ language is the one spread in schools, and Bourdieu (1991) compares languages with currencies in a market where the more valued ones give you greater access to the educational system, and later on the labour market. It is remarkable how these young children were so aware of what the ‘right’ language was and how they associated it with societal success. Baker (2007) considers the consequences of language shift as a threat to multilingual societies. If children perceive the majority language as the more powerful and preferred one, they might favour it instead of their first language.

On the one hand, the Swedish curricula (Ministry of Education and Research in Sweden, 2006), the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and other documents empower the children by stating their right to be active citizens where their voices should be heard. On the other hand, children are constrained from influencing their lives in several ways. When multilingualism is not reflected upon or valued in the pre-school, and the mother tongue’s importance is not appreciated by children, it might lead them away from their right to be active citizens. Subsequently, it might have a negative impact on their future, life-learning process, as individuals and as members of society. What raises a concern is not only the fact that the children believe that developing reading and writing skills in Swedish is the only way to actively participate in Swedish society, but also that many of them already see themselves as not being active and participating citizens.
6.8 Reaching the goals by supporting and involving children

By encouraging children to speak Swedish or by not supporting the mother tongue in pre-school, the children are given the impression that their mother tongue is less valuable. The focus needs to be shifted from what children lack and should develop in their second language acquisition to how we can help children to preserve and develop their first language. To attain the goals in the pre-school curriculum, teachers need to support children’s learning and get involved when it comes to the development of their mother tongue. The importance of awareness will decide what pedagogy should be used. A change will only be possible when we are aware of what we are doing and understand why we do what we do. According to developmental pedagogy, teachers should encourage discussions about a phenomenon and make children talk about their various understandings of it (Pramling Samuelsson & Asplund Carlsson, 2003). Teachers need to focus on a content and support children’s different ways of learning by using the variation in children’s ideas as a starting point. Teachers need to create situations where children have to face differences, listen to how others perceive various phenomena, and question what we take for granted. Language and communication should be the act and object of learning (see Pramling Samuelsson & Asplund Carlsson, 2003).

6.9 Concluding remarks

If we take language away from children, we might exclude them from being active citizens (Viruru, 2001). The results of the study indicate that an important task we are facing is to understand the consequences of encouraging multilingual children to only speak the official language. In the EASE project, the focus has been on ensuring inclusion of multilingual children. To make this possible, we need to understand the child’s perspective (see chapter 4 by Pramling Johansson), respect the rights of the child, and empower children to become autonomous learners.
CHAPTER 7. CONNECTING CURRICULA THROUGH ACTION RESEARCH

Connecting Curricula through Action Research

by Johanna Einarsdottir

7.1 Abstract

The aim of this project is to create a strong and equal partnership between pre-school and primary school and to promote educational continuity in early childhood education. Theoretical background of the study is Dewey’s views on continuity in children’s learning and experiences (Dewey, 1938) and the ecological perspective of Bronfenbrenner (1979). A collaborative action research (Wagner, 1997) was conducted by researchers at the university of Iceland and teachers in three pre-schools and three primary schools in Reykjavik. The purpose of action research in schools is to develop and improve practice. Teachers who participate in action research focus on changing and improving their own practices. New methods that are developed in part by the teachers themselves are being tested. Records are made of the actions that are taken, and data is gathered and analyzed throughout the study period (Koshy, 2008; McNiff, Lomax, & Whitehead, 2003). Informed consent was gained from parents and teachers and the researchers were given permission to present the results. The children also gave their consent for individual activities. In this project the pre-school teachers and primary school teachers were enabled to work together in order to develop a unified approach and a common understanding of education that could be adopted at both educational levels. The participants also developed and tried out methods that were suitable for both school levels and formed continuity between them. The different activities and ideas will be written up and published in a manual for other teachers to use.

7.2 Introduction

The aim of the project described in this chapter was to create a partnership between pre-schools and primary schools in Iceland and to promote educational continuity and flexibility in early childhood education. For this purpose, a group of pre-school teachers and primary school teachers in the city of Reyk-
javik were enabled to work together in order to develop a unified approach and a common understanding of education that could be adopted within both educational levels. Teachers from three pre-schools and three primary schools participated in the project and formed three school pairs, together with researchers at the University of Iceland. Three M.A. students were employed as research assistants and each of them served as a contact person for each school pair table 7.1.

Table 7.1: The groups and their members

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pair I</th>
<th>Pair II</th>
<th>Pair III</th>
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<tr>
<td>Three pre-school teachers</td>
<td>Two pre-school teachers</td>
<td>Two pre-school teachers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Two primary school teachers</td>
<td>Two primary school teachers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Specialist in early literacy</td>
<td>Specialist in early literacy</td>
<td>Specialist in early mathematics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialist in play</td>
<td>Specialist in play</td>
<td>Specialist in play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two specialists in outdoor teaching</td>
<td>Research assistant</td>
<td>Research assistant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research assistant</td>
<td>Project leader</td>
<td>Project leader</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7.2.1 Methods

In order to achieve the research aims, collaborative action research (Wagner, 1997) was conducted. The purpose of action research in schools is to develop and improve practice. Teachers who participate in action research focus on changing and improving their own practices. New methods that are developed in part by the teachers themselves are tested. Records are made of the actions that are taken, and data is gathered and analyzed throughout the study period (Koshy, 2008; McNiff, Lomax, & Whitehead, 2003). In this project, pre-school- and primary school teachers worked together with university researchers in developing a common ideology and pedagogical practice. The model presented in figure 7.1 was developed and used as a guide.

Figure 7.1: An action research model.
CHAPTER 7. CONNECTING CURRICULA THROUGH ACTION RESEARCH

7.3 The study

The study was divided into four phases—preparation, planning changes, implementation, and evaluation—that fuse and become integrated with each other.

7.3.1 First Phase – Preparation

During the first phase of the study the participants were introduced to the concept of action research, and discussed the importance of continuity and transitions between the two school levels during whole-group meetings. A presentation on the aims and characteristics of the action research process was given to the group, and an information booklet was prepared in Icelandic and distributed. The participants were given time and opportunity to discuss and reflect on their own work. Together the school pairs then made decisions about what exactly they would like to emphasize in their cooperation with the other school level. When the school pairs had discussed their interests and considered possible collaborative projects, they decided on the following topics:

Pair I:  Early literacy, play and outdoor teaching,
Pair II: Early literacy and play
Pair III: Early numeracy and play.

7.3.2 Second Phase – Planning Changes

During the second phase of the study, the participants continued discussing ideas and ways to create continuity between the school levels. Ideology and pedagogical practices that were suitable for both school levels were collaboratively developed by the pre-school teachers, the primary school teachers, and researchers from the university. The teachers participated in a workshop that met twice a month; there they listened to experts’ presentations, and discussed, reported, and reflected on their practices. The school pairs met with the research assistants between the meetings in their schools, and sometimes the researchers from the university also participated in these meetings. The research group at the university also met separately once a month during the study period to discuss the development of the project.

During this period the teachers started to keep journals in which they wrote down their thoughts and ideas. The teachers presented their practices to each other through verbal means as well as through video recordings. The teachers took videos of situations that they were satisfied with in their practices and showed them to each other (the school pairs). This second phase of the study was characterized by a lot of talking. The teachers had intense discussions about their practices and how to create continuity between the school levels. These discussions revealed different views and ideologies of the teachers of the two school levels. They also revealed that the teachers used concepts in different ways (e.g. play). This was a frustrating time for some of the participants, especially the pre-school teachers who sometimes felt that the primary school teachers did not understand or value their work.

7.3.3 Third Phase – Implementation

During this phase the teachers concentrated on putting their ideas into practice. The school pairs tried out ideas and developed projects that they worked on with the children. During monthly common meetings
they listened to presentations from other educators who had participated in action research studies. They were also introduced to ways to generate data in order to evaluate the changes and the new practices. The contact persons from the university also met with the teachers once a week in their schools to discuss how things were going and to observe their ideas in action. During joint meetings of the whole group, the teachers presented good practices that they had been trying out and they wanted to share with the others.

When the teachers started to work collaboratively with their ideas and joint projects, it became quite clear that both the pre-school teachers and primary school teachers seemed to make a strong distinction between play and learning. For example, the pre-school teachers’ method to implement literary resources in the pre-school was, in the beginning, to set up special lessons instead of integrating play and literacy. The teachers planned the agenda and started by doing school-like activities with groups of children. As a response to this the project leader prepared and distributed a booklet on educational play in Icelandic and a presentation on play and learning was given during one of the joint meetings. Below are examples of activities from the teachers in group II who worked on play and literacy.

**Storybooks.** The first grade children were used to “writing” stories in personal storybooks, not only in school but also at home. The children then took turns reading their stories aloud for each other in a special “story chair.” The pre-school teachers decided to use this idea in the pre-school, but instead of an individual storybook the pre-school children used one joint book in which they wrote after a common experience, such as field trips. The aim was to create continuity between the school levels. The children start on an activity, and when they come to primary school they continue with a similar activity at a more challenging level.

**Prop boxes.** The teachers in both primary school and pre-school prepared prop boxes with the purpose of encouraging play and literacy. The prop boxes contained items related to certain themes. Grocery store was the first theme. The children and the teachers collected materials for the boxes together. The children brought materials from home, such as boxes from groceries and the teachers brought other things such as cash registers, calculators, and grocery bags. The children made money and credit cards themselves and the teachers copied play money for them to use in the store. The teachers also provided writing materials which the children used to write notes and memos and mark the prices. In the beginning the pre-school teachers played with the children and demonstrated the possible use of the materials. Then the children were given the opportunity to play themselves and be a model for the younger children. In the primary school the children had freedom to play freely with the theme box, with the teacher in the role of observing and asking questions if necessary.

**Literacy activities in the play areas** In the pre-school, the children could choose activities or play areas during the free play period. The pre-school teachers decided to put literacy props into two of these areas: the block centre where the children play with unit blocks and hollow blocks, and the dramatic play area. In the beginning they demonstrated to the children how they could use the writing materials to label, for instance, their buildings. Later, the children were able to use the materials on their own and demonstrate to the younger children how to use them.
Playing with letters  The pre-school teachers prepared small letters for the children to play with. In the beginning the teachers planned lessons where the children worked together to put letters together to make up words and names they knew. Later the children were encouraged to write down these words. When the children had been introduced to this new material through teacher-directed activities, the material was placed in the children’s play area where they could use it during free play.

7.3.4 Fourth Phase – Evaluation

The fourth phase of the study involved evaluation and reflections. During the project diverse methods were used to generate data. The data was analyzed during the project period and also at the end.

Observations. The teachers observed their own practices and recorded what occurred in their classroom. Since it is often difficult to observe one’s own practice, the implementation of the new practices was also observed by the research assistants and the specialist from the university.

Photos were used to show what was being done as well as what changes were made during the study. They were also used to document specific events and to present and reflect on what happened.

Video recording of best practices. The teachers recorded elements of their best practices, edited the tape with the help of the research assistants and showed the videos to each other.

Video recording of new practices. The teachers documented their new practices with video cameras, edited the tape with the help of the research assistants, and shared the videos during joint meetings.

Evaluation sheets were developed to help the teachers evaluate specific learning experiences. The evaluation form for literacy activities developed by the EASE partners was one of these forms (see chapter on page 21)

Journals. Since the teachers who participated in the project were not only teachers but researchers as well, their diaries and reflections were important data. They were encouraged to document specific events or conditions and information about when, where, what, who, how, and why things were done like they were done. They were also encouraged to write short anecdotes and to reflect on various issues concerning the implementation of the new methods. At the end of the project, the teachers were asked to summarise their logs into one or two A4 pages and evaluate the outcomes.

Interviews were conducted with the teachers in the beginning and at the end of the project. The pre-school teachers were asked what they saw as the main role of pre-school education, if they thought that literacy and numeracy should be a part of the pre-school program, and what their expectations were for the primary school. In similar fashion the primary school teachers were asked what they thought children should learn in first grade and pre-school, if and how reading and mathematics should be taught and what they believed would be different from pre-school for children in primary school.

Recordings from meetings. The meetings were audiotaped and transcribed.

The next step in the study is writing a report on our findings and presenting it to practitioners in the field. Policy formulation will be developed based on the results of the project. The final product will be used as a curriculum framework for continuous early childhood education.
7.4 Conclusion

In this study, groups of pre-school teachers and primary school teachers came together to collaborate on a project that examined ways of creating continuity for children from pre-school to the first years of their primary education. Although the teachers were enthusiastic about the project and were interested in the challenge of creating continuity between school levels, the journey was not without complexities. The most obvious one was the difference of ideology and working modes and different understandings of concepts such as play. For the pre-school teachers, play was something that belonged to the children, and which they were not eager to interfere with. They stated that children learn and develop through play. The primary school had not considered play much and it was not a part of the curriculum. Both separated play and learning and struggled with finding ways to combine them. When they started to implement new methods, the pre-school teachers began to plan lessons instead of finding ways to incorporate learning areas and play. Another constraint related to this action research project was time. The teachers had difficulties in finding time to fit the project in their daily schedule and they also had difficulties finding times to meet. Thus, they had a tendency to separate the project from the regular school curriculum. The third obstacle was related to the initial planning of the project, which was the initiative of the university personnel who invited the teachers to take part in the project. If it had been the other way around, the teachers might have regarded it more as their own endeavour, and the university specialists could have played more of a background role instead of acting as instigators and leaders. In the future there will be opportunities to address these issues to a greater extent; the teams that have been working together on the project have shown interest in continuing to work together with the goal of creating continuity in children’s education, and examining the possibilities of integrating the concepts of play and learning.
CHAPTER 8

The Relationship between Family and Kindergarten

by Ágnes Nyitrai-Szombathelyi and Mónika Kicsák, Judit Villányi, and Katalin Zóka

8.1 Abstract

According to the child-focused concept parents should be involved in the institutional education of their children. The basis of the partnership is the understanding of the families’ needs. Differentiated communication with families means building partnership knowing about the needs, values, structures of the families and of the educational traditions, the way of life and the activities of parents. It is very important to adapt communication to the family structure. There is a rich variety of contact in the kindergartens, e.g. parents’ meetings, open day, family room… etc. The positive effect of a good partnership (inclusion of parents into kindergarten life) is part of everyday life in a way that the family-centered views, the sense of responsibility and the awareness of the indispensable role of family education can be reinforced.

8.2 Hungarian values and traditions of the past

The relationship between institutions of small children’s education and families were influenced by the political principles of the given social systems during the 180 years long past of Hungarian small child education.

In the institutions called “Angels’ garden”, founded by Terez Brunsvik in 1828 the positive aim was “inclusion and protection” while mothers were working. Education had a secondary role (Adolf, 1891, p. 198). Education—under the influence of Pestalozzi and Fröbel—however was already among the principles of Terez Brunsvik together with her early ideas of small children’s special collective education.

The Hungarian infant educators, especially Ferenc Ney, pointed out very aptly that “some educators see the kindergarten as a school, others as a playground while only a few of them find the golden mean” (Ferenc, 1847) which unfortunately is still the case today.
In the period of the two World Wars the reformist pedagogic trends only had a partial influence on small child education. The Parents’ School headed by Laszlo Nagy was operating in this period. The efficiency of the Montessori methods was perceptible in few institutions and in professional training. The aim was mainly taking care of children and teaching basic knowledge to improve the life of school drop-outs and under-educated children (with only 4 years of education).

Parents’ associations were founded after the Second World War. The Parent Academy was managed by the Hungarian Women’s Democratic Association till 1956. In the 1970s the Parents’ Committee of the Patriotic Popular Front helped family education with book series. In a publication for the improvement of cooperation between parents and kindergartens the following can be read: “the common elaboration and realization of educational tasks should be set as the main aim of the relationship between parents and kindergartens.” (Népfront, 1977, p. 5). The publication focuses on the harmonization of the family and the kindergarten agenda. Each of the Central Content Regulators (in 1971 and in 1989) dedicated a special chapter to the forms and special features of the family-kindergarten relationship and even methods were defined. Since the political transformation of 1989 the principles of the National Basic Program of Kindergarten Education are embedded in the Hungarian educational traditions. At the same time these principles assure the enforcement of local educational principles, traditions and parents’ needs through a double level of content regulation. This type of professional guidance allows the accomplishment of the currently adequate education in communities and the realization of a child-focused approach keeping in mind the differentiated needs of children.

8.3 The strength and weaknesses of the present situation

The basis of the efficient development is the comprehensive view of small child development and of the appropriate methods that are laid down in the local education programs of kindergartens. The notion of learning at the age of small children can be interpreted widely and its meaning is gradually enriching during the first school years: from occasional (spontaneous) learning in a broad spectrum of the whole of the personality till targeted conscious acquisition of knowledge. Naturally the adult, the educator leading and organizing this learning process is also changing. The cooperation between the family and the educating kindergarten as well as with the educating teaching school and their supporting methods can all help the transition between the different stages of the process.

The partnership established in the interest of children is the basis of the natural process that brings the joy of successful achievement and growth to small children when they can participate in activities that correspond to their age. Good pedagogical sense, skills and attitude are needed for all this. Pressure, bringing forward tasks and “extra-large” requirements are considered as serious professional errors. The appropriate activities are varying with age. We live every minute of our lives at different ages and it is not a “preparation” for the next minute. Attitude changes among parents and kindergarten educators are needed for the acceptance and realization of these principles.

Leaving the family, entering the first institution and spending a large part of the day among strangers is a much larger shock than leaving the kindergarten for the school. The groups of 20–25, sometimes even 30 are frightening and confusing and for a child strongly attached to his/her family this can be an even more difficult trial. From this perspective the open, all-encompassing and accepting attitude of the kindergarten educator, the harmonization of the customs of the family and the kindergarten as well as the
understanding of the difficulties and the methods of establishing relations with parents are of exceptional
importance. Pedagogic principles laid down in the local educational program can promote all that.

According to the child-focused concept parents should be involved in the institutional education of
their children. Due to the bilateral communication situation difficulties may occur. Building trust is the
basis of the successful concept focusing on the child whose interests are important for both sides. To
assure a successful change from one institution to another, both, the kindergarten and the school must
establish trust relations with families. The education programs of the project aim at the creation of ped-
agogic competences that can help to have such trust relations with the families of children from different
backgrounds and to establish good long term cooperation with them. A helpful, supportive attitude
among the parents is also needed and it can be stimulated by the educator experienced in community
building.

In kindergarten education the background processes promoting linguistic (mother tongue) learning
are realized in affectionate caring, in free play in which the educator is participating (but not managing
and not teaching directly) based on the ideas of children and in everyday listening of fairy-tales. Plays
and tales are the appropriate forms of learning at that age, they are the agents to develop all senses
and think about experiences followed with curiosity and observed closely. In fact, gradually more and
more complex forms of plays and tales together with rhythmically repeated speeches and conversations
in the framework of the daily program prepare children for school learning. The child educated according
to his/her age in kindergarten can fulfill the well designed school requirements. Most forms of playing
contain movements, singing, children’s poems, imagination, collective experiences, “free speech” and
associating ideas. Plays and tales are natural methods of the reception and understanding of the world.
Mixed age groups are best from this point of view. In such groups, both playing and following speeches
are more diversified which makes learning by imitation easier.

The speaking behavior of the kindergarten educator that shows acceptance and warm feelings is
extremely important as linguistic experience/reminiscences are attached to cold and warm sentimental
poles. Intellectual maturity can reach the desired level only in a caring and secure atmosphere.

The continuous joint education, the establishment of partnership as formulated in the 1993 Public
Education Law is more and more needed due to the social developments influencing families. This law
reinforces the relation between the family and the institution. Parents have the right to participate in the
decision making concerning caring, education and the development of their child. The task of educators
is to initiate building up mutual understanding and a good relationship. Parents can not be excluded from
the discussion of common development tasks. This cooperation is especially important to ease transition
from kindergarten to school. The good relationship between the kindergarten educator and the parents
assures self- confidence and protection for the child.

The basis of the partnership is the understanding of the families’ needs. The task of the educator
is to make the first steps and initiate the partnership with the parents. An important basic principal:
the educator helps, advises, supports and hints at possible problems. The educator’s sensitivity towards
special problems is a precondition of the open institution model. In the past decades the concept of the
role of educators in Hungary has undergone some changes. The earlier “knowledge-organizer-clerk” role
has been enriched with the desired attitudes. The educator’s role consists of three components:

- educator
- professional
The educator needs authority to work efficiently and influence children and parents successfully. Authority depends first of all on the quality of the relationship that is influenced by the attitude and style of the educator, by interactions and communication, by professional skills, capacities of contacting people, by the facility of consensus and cooperation.

The positive effect of a good partnership (inclusion of parents in kindergarten life) is part of everyday life:

- Parents can observe their child in the community, they may transfer the most appropriate methods.
- They have a better understanding of the educational process, of the age characteristics of children and they can get acquainted with individual development features.
- They may witness good practices of dealing with children and of collective plays.
- They can follow the methods of kindergarten educators and enlarge their own educational capacities.

The parents gain experiences with the development of children coming from different family environments. Their family centered views, their sense of responsibility and the awareness of the indispensable role of family education can be reinforced. It’s a pity that not enough attention is paid to all these activities and sometimes the emphasis is not strong enough. This needs to change.

**Differentiated communication with families:** Differentiation means building partnership in the knowledge of the needs, values, structures of the families and of the educational traditions, way of lives and activities of parents. Kindergarten educators knowing the children should convince the parents in the course of their cooperation in which area their child needs special, more intensive development to become mature for schooling.

**Communication adapted to family structure:** Cooperation needs an appropriate partner from among the family members. The kindergarten educator should value who has the utmost authority in the family, who represents the main resource. A single mother, if she has a job, can hardly meet the kindergarten educator. A grandmother replacing her can be a partner. The situation can be similar in the case of a multi-generational family. There are families where the mother, in others where the father has the stronger role. In such cases it might be most efficient to co-operate with the parent having the stronger authority, however excluding the other parent completely can in no way be the right solution.

**Parents meeting, open day, family room... there is a rich variety of building up contacts in the kindergartens:**

The general pedagogical issues concern first of all the specifics of age. But given that beside age similarities there are many individual differences, this is not enough information for the parents. Parents can be partners in education when they get support in solving the problems connected to their children and when the educator values their contributing help.

### 8.4 Strategy, plans, tasks

The government decree No.137/1996 (VIII.28.) on content regulation, issued more then 10 years ago has been modified by a new government decree 255/2009 (XI.20.).
This decree contains and reinforces certain elements that are of special importance in the successful education of children within the families, in the kindergartens as well as in schools.

Some elements from the Basic Program:

1. **Priority areas of linguistic (mother tongue) education** during the transition from kindergarten to school are the following: the way of thinking, internal image construction, and duplication of the world by a complex system of signs. The attainment of the mother tongue (internal image construction, the duplication of the world by a complex system of signs) is a result of a learning process based on strong motivation and serious efforts assured by internal harmonization. The cognitive competences supporting linguistic learning must be developed for this result:

2. “Kindergarten education serves the development of the child together with and complementing family education. Cooperation with the family is a precondition for that. The forms of cooperation are varying, from personal contact to different events. There are different possibilities created by the kindergarten and by the family. The kindergarten educator takes into consideration the specifics and customs of families and realizes during cooperation the interventionist practice, that is, the solutions of support designed for the family.”

3. “The kindergarten keeps contact with the organizations before entering kindergarten (crèches and other social institutions), during kindergarten life (institutions of pedagogic services, child welfare services, caring shelters, health or public education institutions) and after kindergarten life (schools) that play a decisive role in children’s lives. The forms and methods how these contacts are kept correspond to the respective tasks and needs. Kindergarten should be open and develop plenty of initiatives.”

4. “The kindergartens educating children of different national and ethnic minorities keep contact with the respective local minority governments and minority organizations.”

Family functions as a system, its atmosphere, the effectiveness of its functions are influenced by several factors. The educating activity of the educator depends on his/her acquaintance with the child, on his/her capacity to have a vision of the child in the family context (intervention). No success can be achieved without coherent education together with the family.

Differences between the institutional (kindergarten – school) education and family customs may present obstacles to a harmonious development of children. In the course of cooperation kindergarten educators and teachers may transfer such psychological, educational knowledge and practical experiences to the parents that can result in children’s education to be more successful.

The family–institution relation is especially important in transitions. When this cooperation is based on trust, the difficulties of integration into the kindergarten and during the kindergarten-school transition can be better overcome with the help of the parents.

Children arrive at the institutions (kindergartens, schools) from different socio-cultural backgrounds. Poverty, multiple handicaps, cultural differences may often lead to distancing, to mistrust and to prejudices on both sides. Cooperation can be successful, if it is not based on differences, but on a respect for the dignity of all human beings. The task of educators is to get acquainted with the social patterns transmitted by the child’s family and direct environment as well as by the different family value systems. Tolerance and understanding may help in the construction of the partnership. Without a family environment that stimulates learning the effectiveness of kindergarten-school education can hardly be assured.
9.1 Abstract

The subject of the discussion in this article is the parents’ role in the learning process of their children. Having a closer look at the issue of cooperation between children and parents, it becomes obvious that it is a more complex problem than it may seem. The great majority of parents are much involved in their children’s school activities providing support for learning and monitoring their progress (Bruce, 1997). Without securing appropriate educational support for the child at home, there is little chance that knowledge provided at school will have a lasting effect (Borich, 1988). It usually happens that children who regularly work at home with their parents are more likely to achieve success than those who do not have an opportunity of cooperation with adults. Those young learners who practice and revise material outside the classroom are often more creative in the classroom and they rarely have difficulties with performing homework (Fontana, 1995). Thus, parental support in education—at home and in the classroom—is vital to effective learning and discipline and can improve the social and emotional development of young learners.
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tal to effective learning and discipline and can improve the social and emotional development of young
learners.

The quality of the relationship between parents and children has an important role in building the
child’s personality. Parents influence their children in many different ways and shape their characters.
This influence may be either positive or negative depending on the characteristics of the family as each
family is a distinct nucleus of interacting individuals unique in various needs and expectations (Seifert,
1987). That is why numerous factors need to be taken into consideration when thinking about parental
engagement in the child’s cognitive, emotional and psychological development.

Among different factors influencing cooperation between children and adults in the family, parents’
beliefs concerning the methods of rearing have been shown to influence children’s performance in the
classroom. Sigel (1985) argues that parents’ beliefs serve as a guideline to their activities with their
children. Similarly, Bacon and Ashmore (1986) argue that if we want to understand parents’ interactions
with their children we must understand their beliefs. Goodnow (1988) also suggests that parents’ beliefs
are likely to function as general guidelines to parents’ orientation towards child rearing.

According to Maccoby and Martin (1983), there are four main parenting styles representing different
beliefs towards the methods of rearing that can influence the final success of cooperation between
children and their parents.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Responsive</th>
<th>Unresponsive</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demanding</td>
<td>Authoritative</td>
<td>Authoritarian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undemanding</td>
<td>Indulgent</td>
<td>Uninvolved</td>
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Authoritative parents promote cooperation, are both demanding and responsive, set clear and consis-
tent behavioural guidelines for children. They are flexible but firm, not usually as controlling, allowing
the child to explore more freely, thus having them make their own decisions based on their own rea-
soning. These parents are more respectful and more able to encourage individual opinions from their
children but retain the final authority for decisions. They may, for instance, ask their children if they
need to be supported in learning English and try to reveal what kind of help is needed. What is more,
they often offer their help without asking if it is necessary but if they realize that children are able to
achieve good results themselves, they do not disturb them but only monitor learners in their own way to
progress. Children from authoritative homes are more socially and instrumentally competent than those
whose parents are non-authoritative.

On the contrary, authoritarian parents always try to be in control, boss their children and tell them
exactly what to do and even when to do it. They are highly demanding and directive but unresponsive
to children’s needs. Those parents don’t explain why they want their children to do a particular thing.
If questioned about the reason, the parent would probably answer, “Because I said so.” Authoritarian
parents believe in expecting a very high level of achievement and status from their children. They make
the rules, expect unquestioned obedience from their children and punish misbehaviour. So there is no
freedom for learners what to learn and how to learn and no chance for cooperation based on understand-
ing of mutual needs and expectations. Finally, authoritarian parents want their children to be assertive as
well as socially responsible, and self-regulated as well as cooperative (Baumrind, 1991, p. 62). Children
from authoritarian homes tend to perform moderately well in school, but they have poorer social skills, lower self-esteem, and higher levels of depression than those from authoritative families.

**Indulgent parents** (also referred to as ‘permissive’ or ‘nondirective’) are responsive but undemanding and permissive. They do not require children to regulate themselves or behave appropriately, allow considerable self-regulation, and avoid confrontation (Baumrind, 1991, p. 62). Thus indulgent parents raise unhappy children who lack self-control. Such children perform less well in school, but they have higher self-esteem, better social skills, and lower levels of depression.

Most uninvolved (neglectful) parents are often indifferent in their behaviour toward their children. They are undemanding, permissive and set few clear boundaries and therefore are unable to encourage, teach or support their children’s learning. As these parents often lack the necessary social skills to maintain relationships, in extreme cases, they might encompass both rejection and disregard. Children whose parents are uninvolved perform most poorly in all domains.

The four above mentioned parental styles are closely connected with different rearing methods which influence children’s cognitive, emotional and social development. According to Pramling (1998), whose view is different from the common belief that only school should educate children, parents are mainly responsible for a child’s upbringing and development. The pre- and primary school should only support the home by creating appropriate and effective strategies for a child’s development. The school’s work with children should, thus, take place in close and active cooperation with the home. This cooperation may have an additional positive impact on the process of learning and teaching. And that is why parents should have a good relationship with the school staff. They both should contribute to the child’s well-being, development and learning and they should also take an active part in planning, carrying out and assessing the activities.

### 9.2 The positive effect of a good partnership

The positive effect of a good partnership (inclusion of parents in kindergarten life) is part of everyday life:

- Parents can observe their child in the community, they may transfer the most appropriate methods.
- They have a better understanding of the educational process, of the age characteristics of children and they can get acquainted with individual development features.
- They may witness good practices of dealing with children and of collective plays.
- They can follow the methods of kindergarten educators and enlarge their educational capacities.

The parents gain experiences with the development of children coming from different family environments. Their family centered views, their sense of responsibility and the awareness of the indispensable role of family education can be reinforced. It’s a pity that not enough attention is paid to all these activities and sometimes the emphasis is not strong enough. This needs to change.

### 9.2.1 Differentiated communication with families

Differentiation means building a partnership considering the needs, values and structures of the families and of the educational traditions, the ways of lives and activities of parents. Kindergarten educators knowing the children should convince the parents in the course of their cooperation in which area their child needs special, more intensive development to become mature for schooling.
9.2.2 Communication adapted to family structure

Cooperation needs an appropriate partner from among the family members. The kindergarten educator should value who has the utmost authority in the family, who represents the main resource. A single mother, if she has a job, can hardly meet the kindergarten educator. A grandmother replacing her can be a partner. The situation can be similar in the case of a multi-generational family. There are families where the mother, in others where the father has the stronger role. In such cases it might be most efficient to cooperate with the parent having the stronger authority however excluding the other parent completely can in no way be the right solution.

9.2.3 Parents meeting, open day, family room... there is a rich variety of building up contact in the kindergartens

The general pedagogical issues concern first of all the specifics of age. But given that beside age similarities there are many individual differences, this is not enough information for the parents. Parents can be partners in the education when they get support in solving the problems connected to their children and when the educator asks their contributing help.
10.1 Abstract

This article is based on a research project which aimed at investigating the extent to which the creation of mixed groups of pre-schoolers and first grade students contributes to early literacy development as well as to record teachers’ discoveries about the transition. For that purpose we designed a pilot research in two pre-schools and two primary schools in the prefecture of Thessaloniki, Greece, for a period of six months in 2009–2010. 64 students, who were separated into two groups, took part in the research. One group was the experimental group and the other one was the control group. The research was realized in two phases with one teaching intervention. At first a pretest was given to both groups. Then the teaching intervention took place and finally a post test was given to both groups. The research results which came into light after the appropriate statistical processing show the extent to which mixed age groups contribute to early literacy development.

10.2 Introduction

After three decades of research, the transition from pre-school to primary school still remains a central research issue in the field of pre-school and early school education. “We define transition as a complex process made up of continued social activity in which the individual lives and learns to cope by adapting to the given social conditions. We highlight that children do not learn in isolation, but belong to several microsystems and commute between these environments, adapting to their different demands and learning from each other” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Fabian, 2007b, p. 13).
However, the effort to cope with the multi-level changes, imposed simultaneously by the prescriptions, the rules and the demands of the new environment, puts the mental strength of the individual on trial (Fabian, 2002). There is a gap in the continuity of the process, education and learning (Vrinioti & Matsagouras, 2005), which will probably have not only direct negative impact upon behavior and school performance during the early school years, but it will also have a short-term negative impact upon the formation of the person’s traits (Kienig, 2002). Collaboration between pre-school, primary school and parents is considered the most important factor in confronting the difficulties of the transition (Broström, 2007; Dockett & Perry, 2007), while the directional idea for the normal transition is the development of “the continuity” between the two educational institutions (Dunlop & Fabian, 2002a), i.e. to make sure that the aims, the goals and the curriculum of the pre-school and the primary school are compatible.

On the other hand, by the term “early literacy” we consider the experiences, points of view and attitudes that children build about reading and writing as they are continuously interacting with the social groups in real communication situations. Early literacy emerges from the child himself/herself, it involves the notion of dynamic movement and acquisition and is a continuous, ceaseless and lifelong process showing the following characteristics:

- It promotes the values of the written speech and highlights its social dimension.
- It accepts the relationship between oral and written speech.
- It emphasizes the interaction with the texts.
- It aims at the awareness of the form and function of the written speech.
- It emphasizes understanding.
- It calls for an active child participation.
- It adopts an interactive adult role.
- It promotes a rich environment in written speech stimuli (Sivropoulou, under publication; White-hurst & Lonigan, 2001).

Until the end of the 20th century in Greece the issue of transition of the child from pre-school to primary school has almost never interested the scientific community neither as an educational problem of practice nor as a matter of educational policy or as a research object. The few research efforts during the last years are still at an early stage and do not create any new knowledge (Vrinioti, 2008). Therefore, the goal of this research is to create a strong and equal partnership between pre-school and primary school and to promote educational continuity and flexibility in early childhood education. More precisely, the research aims were the following four.

- to develop a common pre-school and primary school, communicative-teaching approach in early literacy and language practice within a participatory approach.
- to encourage language acquisition and early literacy approaches in both pre-schools and primary schools.
- to assess children’s literacy learning and thus encourage them to reflect on their own learning processes at the beginning of lifelong learning.
- to enable the participants to use the Learning-Stories method as a means of evaluation, in order to encourage language acquisition.
CHAPTER 10. EARLY LITERACY IN TRANSITION FROM PRE-SCHOOL TO PRIMARY SCHOOL: CONNECTING CURRICULA

10.3 Method:

The research lasted six months from October 2009 to April 2010 with 64 students (32 pre-school students and 32 first grade students) as participants, as well as two primary school teachers and three pre-school teachers. The two pre-schools and the two primary schools were chosen for the following reasons:

- Teachers from pre-schools and primary schools were interested in participating.
- The pre-schools and the primary schools were chosen in pairs due to their close proximity to one another.

Other participants in the research included: One research assistant and two experts from the University of Western Macedonia; the latter two are the authors of the present paper.

Experimental group and Control group  The 64 (pre-school and first grade) students were separated into two groups, the Experimental group (E.G.) and the Control group (C.G.) in the following way. The Experimental group consisted of 32 children (16 pre-schoolers and 16 first graders) and the teaching intervention involved creating mixed groups of pre-schoolers and first graders. The Control group consisted of 32 children. However, there was no teaching of mixed groups, that is the 16 pre-schoolers and the 16 first graders were taught in their own separate classrooms. 24 stories were chosen for the teaching intervention, which were used in the same order in both the Experimental and the Control group. The story selection criteria were the following:

- They shouldn’t be too long.
- They should be close to the children’s interests.
- There should be a possibility of text extension through activities.
- Meanings should be promoted for understanding.

Phases of the research  The research was designed and realized in two phases with one teaching intervention. All students were assessed before and after the teaching intervention with pre and post tests (Bloom & Quint, 1999). In addition, the teachers kept journals recording their observations every day, while the assistant researcher was video-recording the teachings from both groups (E. G. and C. G.). Furthermore, all participants in the project met once a month to comment on the recorded teachings, to get feedback and reflect on the process.

10.3.1 First phase: Initial test

The diagnostic process of the initial test (pre-test) was applied in October 2009 for students of both groups with individual observation from the teacher. Every day the teacher was observing a child and then she recorded his/her performance on the observation sheet (initial and final test).
# Chapter 10. Early Literacy in Transition from Pre-School to Primary School: Connecting Curricula

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experimental or control group</th>
<th>a/a</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spoken Language</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Plays with words/expressions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Plays with rhythm in spoken words</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Telling others about personal opinions, pictures, texts and/or experiences</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Tells own stories</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Understands and uses new concepts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Sings songs and rhythms</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Refers to objects in the surroundings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Connects actions with words</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written Language-reading</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Is curious about letters and words</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Is aware of signs etc.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Connects logos with meaning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Performs “play reading”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Is aware of the direction of reading</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Knows ‘near and dear’ letters/words</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written language-writing</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Performs “playwriting”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Puts text on drawings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Writes letters/words/sentences</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Breaks up words into syllables</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Makes text-like doodles</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Writes “near and dear” letters/words</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Manipulates language and symbols using computer software</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Writes with-and different stuff</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language communication and literature</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Participates in read-aloud activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Draws, paraphrases and in other ways processes a story</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Acts out/plays a story</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10.1: DANMARKS PÆDAGOGISKE, UNIVERSITETSSKOLE, AARHUS UNIVERSITET, 2010

The indicators were used in the framework suggested by Elisabeth Mellgren, Anders Skriver Jensen & Ole Henrik Hansen (http://www.ease-eu.com)
Teaching intervention  The process of teaching intervention followed concisely the five steps.

1st step  Introduction to the story. The teacher introduces the story to the children through a “surprise” (doll, puppet show, letter, cassette-recorder, overhead projector, photographs, computer, and so on).

2nd step  Reading-aloud of the story. The teacher reads the story text aloud, pointing at the words, but stops wherever needed and presents her thoughts aloud, having as main aim the creation of pictures in the children’s minds, pictures which will help them to understand and interpret the text. Other times she stops in order for the children to guess/imagine and describe the hero. All students express their points of view. Then the teacher develops her own description aloud. Sometimes she comments on her and on the group’s predictions about the plot. She continues with the read-aloud and she stops again in order to ask about a word she doesn’t know. The children try to guess the word from the context. The teacher explains her opinion aloud. “This word must mean...” she continues to read aloud and she stops. What is a pumpkin and what can we do with it? The students express their opinions. The teacher provides her own point of view. I think we can make soup plates, water pots, decorations. Let’s see what the story says. When the reading is over, the teacher tries to diagnose if the children have understood the story. Therefore she goes on to the next step which is “the summary cube”.

Figure 10.1: The summary cube

The teacher holds a cube in her hands. Every side of the cube has one of the words (Character, Setting, Problem, Fact, Beginning, End) in order to encourage the children to read the words and understand the literary elements of the narration and summarize the story. The cube passes in front of every student, who throws it and when it stands the student who threw it tries to recognise/read
the word appearing on its upper side. For example the student recognises the word “Hero” and then he explains and describes the hero-protagonist of the story. The cube stops to be thrown when all the words written on its six sides have appeared. If the word “Hero” appears many times then the student who threw the cube throws it again or supplements the characteristics of the hero not noticed by his peer. In this way children describe, explain, understand the story better and they are led to the 4th step which is the extension of the story through activities chosen by the children themselves.

4th step Dramatizing/extending the story through activities chosen by the children themselves. The stories usually contained a problem, which students were invited to solve by working in groups. They sometimes chose role-play, other times they chose a puppet show, gallantry show, book creation, painting or writing, building, newspaper making or labels or posters or writing wishes or letters and so on.

5th step Assessment by children and teacher. When students have finished their work in groups, they come altogether in order to present their work to their friends/peers. Every group presents its work and comments on the work of the others.

At the end the teacher as a member of the group points out her own experiences. Sometimes she extends children’s knowledge, other times she comments, asks, explains, argues, etc. During the intervention teachers observe and record children’s reactions.

10.3.2 Second phase: final test (post test)

The final test followed the teaching intervention. During this phase, which took place in March 2010, the same process like with the initial test followed. The data collection was realized through the method of observation. Assessment of the program outcomes was based on the differences presented between the two groups in relation to the initial and final measurement, which, since other factors have been excluded, are due to the different organization of the groups.

10.4 Outcomes

If we look at Tables 10.2 and 10.3, we see that both groups, the experimental as well as the control group, show improvement in some of the indicators between the initial and the final test. It was to some extent expected that the control group would improve its performance because of attending pre-school/primary and also because of the age difference of six months. However, the expectation was that the improvement would be greater in the experimental group. This expectation was indeed confirmed. Looking, firstly, at Table 10.2, we observe that the experimental group shows statistically significant resp. highly significant differences of the means between the initial and the final test in 18 out of 25 indicators.

Now, looking at Table 10.3 we see that the control group has improved its means between the initial and the final test in 19 indicators with statistically significant resp. highly significant differences. We observe further that in the following 15 indicators both groups improved their means significantly; these are the indicators: 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 15, 17, 21, 22, 24, 25.
Table 10.2: Experimental Group (Paired Samples Test)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
<th>Lower</th>
<th>Upper</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Pair 1</td>
<td>Ind. 1 - Ind. 1</td>
<td>.531</td>
<td>.567</td>
<td>.100</td>
<td>.327</td>
<td>.736</td>
<td>5.299</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 2</td>
<td>Ind. 2 - Ind. 2</td>
<td>.438</td>
<td>.564</td>
<td>.100</td>
<td>.234</td>
<td>.641</td>
<td>4.385</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 3</td>
<td>Ind. 3 - Ind. 3</td>
<td>.438</td>
<td>.564</td>
<td>.100</td>
<td>.234</td>
<td>.641</td>
<td>4.385</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 4</td>
<td>Ind. 4 - Ind. 4</td>
<td>.688</td>
<td>.693</td>
<td>.122</td>
<td>.438</td>
<td>.937</td>
<td>5.614</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 5</td>
<td>Ind. 5 - Ind. 5</td>
<td>.688</td>
<td>.535</td>
<td>.095</td>
<td>.495</td>
<td>.880</td>
<td>7.268</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pair 6</td>
<td>Ind. 6 - Ind. 6</td>
<td>.344</td>
<td>.545</td>
<td>.096</td>
<td>.147</td>
<td>.540</td>
<td>3.566</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>.001</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pair 7</td>
<td>Ind. 7 - Ind. 7</td>
<td>.594</td>
<td>.560</td>
<td>.099</td>
<td>.392</td>
<td>.796</td>
<td>5.999</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>.000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pair 8</td>
<td>Ind. 8 - Ind. 8</td>
<td>.563</td>
<td>.619</td>
<td>.109</td>
<td>.339</td>
<td>.786</td>
<td>5.141</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>.000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pair 9</td>
<td>Ind. 9 - Ind. 9</td>
<td>.563</td>
<td>.716</td>
<td>.127</td>
<td>.304</td>
<td>.821</td>
<td>4.447</td>
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<tr>
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<td>.469</td>
<td>.507</td>
<td>.090</td>
<td>.286</td>
<td>.652</td>
<td>5.230</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>.000</td>
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<td>.375</td>
<td>.492</td>
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<td>.507</td>
<td>.090</td>
<td>.286</td>
<td>.652</td>
<td>5.230</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>.000</td>
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<tr>
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<td>.095</td>
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<td>.309</td>
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<td>.571</td>
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<td>.572</td>
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<td>.782</td>
<td>.138</td>
<td>.687</td>
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<td>7.006</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>.000</td>
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<td>Ind.16 - Ind.16</td>
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<td>.400</td>
<td>.071</td>
<td>-.113</td>
<td>.176</td>
<td>.442</td>
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<td>.662</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pair 17</td>
<td>Ind.17 - Ind.17</td>
<td>.750</td>
<td>.508</td>
<td>.090</td>
<td>.567</td>
<td>.933</td>
<td>8.352</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>.000</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Ind.18 - Ind.18</td>
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<td>1.314</td>
<td>.232</td>
<td>-.349</td>
<td>.599</td>
<td>.538</td>
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<td>.660</td>
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<td>1.072</td>
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<td>.292</td>
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<tr>
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<td>.390</td>
<td>.069</td>
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<td>.679</td>
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</table>

Table 10.4 shows the differences between the means of the experimental and the control group for the final test. We see that with the exception of only the first indicator the means of the experimental group are higher than the means of the control group. The differences are noticeable for 13 indicators (5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 12, 13, 15, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23) also statistically significant resp. highly significant.
### Table 10.3: Control Group (Paired Samples Test)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pair</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
<th>Lower</th>
<th>Upper</th>
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<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
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#### 10.5 Discussion

The data allow us to draw certain conclusions concerning the main aim of the present study, which is to investigate the contribution of the mixed groups from pre-schoolers and first graders to the early literacy development. The main finding focused on the fact that there are significant differences between the two groups. There is a higher trend for improvement, in all indicators, in the experimental group, which can be attributed to the co-existence of mixed groups (pre-school and first grade students).

The quality observations from both teachers (primary school and pre-school teacher) resulted in the following:

**Regarding the students:** The development of social and communicative skills was reinforced by the mixed groups of pre-schoolers and first graders, as well as the initiative in starting interactions, the exchange of information and ideas, the question-posing, the following of instructions, the dedication to the work and the support given to each other at group level. The teacher notices “children have understood that, if they need help they can rely on their friends and peers”. And elsewhere “the children had the chance to express their ideas, comment on their peers’ opinions and points of view, think critically,
talk about themselves and their environment, argue, pose questions and put themselves in the “other’s”
shoes. The inner motives like self-knowledge and self-respect were also reinforced. In this way non
acceptable forms of behavior were minimized. The students themselves described their class atmosphere
in a very positive way.

Regarding the teachers: In order to accomplish “continuity”, teachers of the experimental group drew
the following conclusions.

Non directional teaching: Teachers of both levels pointed out that learning is more effective when it
adapts itself to the students’ personal pace and that the more the issues and the depth to which the
subjects are treated, the more the students feel like learning, which means that substantial learn-
ing is not tiring. Learning is substantial in the context of a relaxing environment which activates
students. The first grade teacher points out: “I decided that I had to limit my own participation
in children’s negotiations and encourage children to interact with each other and think in order to
respond to communication demands. That is how I could see children as creators and producers
of their language, in a climate of acceptance, mutual respect and self-designing carried out by the
children themselves”.

Management of useful and appropriate literacy material: Teachers of the experimental group agreed
that an environment rich in reading stimuli is needed in order to cultivate early literacy. Prints
of the environment are one of the first sources of reading material for young children and they
function as a foundation for the roots of literacy. When children “read” printed material from the
environment they are influenced not only by the graphic, but by the social, contextual, grammatical
and linguistic elements as well. The “summary cube” belonged to this kind of material, giving
students the chance to “read” the proposed words of the cube, to process the narration elements
and to create oral sentences. Consequently the environment (of the pre-school/primary school)
must generate authentic and useful literacy material, comprehensive and appropriate, so that it
helps children to understand the way written speech is organized and used.

Portfolios creation: Teachers of the experimental group noticed that children reveal their abilities and
potential not always in distinct ways. They detected these ways through fine observations and
interpretations and they decided to create assessment portfolios for the young students. This pro-
cess promoted students’ success, giving them many opportunities to show their inclinations and
potential and giving teachers opportunities to respect the students’ potential and reveal each one’s
strong points. One of the two primary school teachers notices: “The creation of portfolios for my
students helped me to realize how many things I know about them. I was given the chance to be
able to refer to them having certain facts and situations to narrate. The observation and recording
of my students’ participation in activities chosen by them also gave me the opportunity to form a
more complete idea about every one of them. I knew at any time what every child could accomplish
and so I could recognize their next step every time they succeeded in something they couldn’t do
in a previous activity”.

The Greek effort has combined school centered staff development with the research attempt. It em-
phasized transition as a functional means for literacy development. However this research must be
considered a first short-range investigation of the opinion that mixed groups of pre-schoolers and
first graders improve students’ literacy to some extent.
It would be useful to repeat the research by drawing a larger representative sample of children and over a longer period of time as well as to investigate other parameters like social learning and the role of educators (Vriniotis & Matsagouras, 2005).
### CHAPTER 10. EARLY LITERACY IN TRANSITION FROM PRE-SCHOOL TO PRIMARY SCHOOL: CONNECTING CURRICULA

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Table 10.4: Differences between the Experimental and the Control-Group in the final Test
11.1 Abstract

The change in our society also means a change in education—but development also means to handle the values of mankind responsibly: Education is more than training, the needs of human beings are not the same as the needs of economics. We know today, that pre-school already extensively determines the educational success of the child: So this article deals with the tasks and obligations of pre-schools in the present society.

11.2 Introduction

The current transition from an information-based to a knowledge-based society has implications for all aspects of society, including education. This is true both in the sociological sense—access to education and the ability to make confident use of the increasing amount of available knowledge become central factors for the distribution of educational and life opportunities (Kahlert, 2008)—and in the educational/social domain. A massive explosion of knowledge, which is also linked to the development of new media, changes affecting cultures, personal and professional lives, due to increasing globalisation and the associated changes to job and qualification requirements for a worldwide labour market - all of these factors prompt us to look differently at the multi-faceted role of education in a knowledge-based society. In connection with the EASE project and its objectives, it is necessary to assess the extent, to which (academic) education understands its own purpose. If education aims to be the “science of the development of the individual” (Natorp, 1923, p. 1) objective/purpose relationship.

For a pedagogy, which sees itself as the “child’s advocate” (Nohl, 1949, pp. 142ff.) in the sense of a “pedagogical relationship” (Nohl, 1949, pp. 142ff.) and distances itself from ideological or economic interests, the child’s welfare and his/her individual potential for development must be the central focus. The realisation of this primacy is currently of great importance: in his reflections on “system and lifeworld”, Jürgen Habermas deals with the influence of cultural values (constraints) and material reproduction, which increasingly uncouple each other—a development with an undeniable effect on school, pre-school¹ and education:

“Nowadays the imperatives communicated by the media, money and power of economics and administrations are permeating into spheres, which somehow break down, if they are separated from communicative action and adjusted to such media-controlled interactions.” (Habermas, 2006, pp. 188f.)

The danger exists that, in a performance-based society highly characterised by neo-liberalism, education may be replaced by drilling and individual development by instrumentalisation—ultimately, the objective would not be the person, but the economic necessities. But the...

“...right of the individual to a full education should be the overriding basic principle of a modern state. The objectives and contents of educational and social work must be repeatedly defined and agreed upon, independently of economic principles, in order to reveal ideological aspects and prevent instrumentalisation tendencies” (Hollerer, 2005, p. 12).

11.3 Autonomy of the child

It is ultimately a matter of the “autonomy of the subject”—including and especially that of the pre-school child. Children are entitled to specific and individual support. This is stated both in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: “Everyone has the right to education ...Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality” (UNI, 2010) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child: “The states parties agree that the education of the children shall be directed to the development of the child’s personality, talents and the mental and physical abilities to their fullest” (UNI, 2010).

In recent years, an increasing emphasis has been placed on the educational significance of the pre-school, which for a long time was seen as a social care institution. Based on the role of the democratic-social state, early social education becomes responsible for offering everyone the same educational opportunities. The discourse term coined by Jürgen Habermas relies on political mobilisation and the use of communication as a productive force: action and interest groups not only stand up for their interests increasingly in the public sector. Interests are also perceived and formulated as political demands in the core areas of the family—in terms of how we educate our own children. This interest in the welfare of our own children and therefore in the quality of the pre-school is an expression of an increasing understanding of democracy—which quality expectations of the pre-school are closely linked with.

11.4 Significance of the pre-school

We know from the many comparative studies linked to PISA and IGLU that pre-school already extensively determines the educational success of the child:

¹The term “pre-school” will henceforth be used for all the various terms used in the member states taking part in the project.
In their conclusions from the 2006 IGLU Study, the authors refer to the educational success of the pre-school (cf. Valtin et al. 2007, pp. 342f). Already in the 2001 IGLU Study, it was shown that children who attended pre-school performed better in mathematics, sciences and spelling. In the 2006 IGLU Study, this finding was also confirmed for reading and learning to write. (Rohlfs & Harring, p. 133)

The equalising role of the pre-school is also proven. Preschool also has the task of providing “…special attention and support for children who grow up in families with little or different cultural and social resources” (Liegle, 2003, p. 120).

The knowledge gained in recent years of brain research and development psychology shows the importance of the early stages of childhood and adolescent maturity stages. In order to develop the highly complex connections in the brain, we now know that children have to gain the largest quantity and variety of experiences. They need a wide range of stimulating opportunities and challenges that activate their emotional centres. Taking into account …the steadily decreasing number of children who grow up in our country, unfortunately, far too many children are unable to develop their potentials to the extent that would be possible under more favourable conditions. Too many children and young people lose their desire to learn, discover and create all too early. They only develop a very limited ability to form relationships and only obtain inadequate skills. It is therefore less a matter of teaching children increasing amounts of knowledge more and more quickly, assisted by support programmes.

What we need are programmes, which prevent what still happens all too often, namely that children lose the desire to learn at some stage and cannot be bothered with school. (Hüther, 2010)

The opportunities to reinforce these necessary learning skills, in which the “subject and act of learning” are seen as “inseparable” (Pramling Samuelsson & Carlsson, 2007, p. 8), are described in the book “Learning by Playing”, which can be seen as groundbreaking in terms of how we see current educational methods in the pre-school sector.

The range of countries represented in the EASE Project and their experiences provide a differentiated picture of the wide range of ways, in which young children are supported in institutional facilities. This does not represent an evaluation of the existing models of early childhood education and support. Objectives should be put into practice and optimised, which enable the children to exist in a future world:

“...we need a new culture in our educational establishments, a culture of appreciation, recognition, encouragement and shared endeavour. A paradigm shift in the structuring of educational processes is therefore unavoidable” (Hüther, 2008).

While retaining as far as possible the existing and historical/national views of education, this project should and can help, within the member states of the European Union, to achieve a contemporary understanding of the framework conditions necessary for early education and teaching/methodological skills.

If the project partners have successfully helped to ensure consistent standards in pre-schools in Europe, which promote the individual needs of children, together with their attitudes and opinions, this represents an important contribution to promoting education in the European Union.
CHAPTER 12

CHAPTER 12

Analysis of the Questionnaire

by Elisabet Mellgren & Ingrid Pramling Samuelsson

12.1 Abstract

As part of the evaluation process we gave the participants questionnaires, before and after the courses they were involved in, altogether about 400. The questions were centred round literacy learning and what the role of pre-school could be in this regard, but also considered documentation as an issue in early childhood education. The results from the analyses of each country’s questionnaire (pre- and/or primary school teachers and parents) are presented mainly in terms of the most important results drawn from all the statistics behind them. The most important result is however the change from the first to the second questionnaire, which means that a lot of the participants in EASE have been influenced in their way of looking at issues of transition related to literacy. A difference between some of the counties is whether pre-school should prepare for primary school as a main aim, or just be for the joy of children’s play.

People’s conceptions of different aspects of the world around them are often an expression coming through when talking about every-day situations. Their ways of expressing themselves rest on perspectives that are taken for granted. These perspectives can however be more or less reflected or conscious in each individual. In a phenomenographic (Marton & Booth, 1997) approach researching the analysis becomes a question of understanding each individual’s perception of what he or she is expressing. The results are descriptions of categories of conceptions. How many categories there will appear in the analysis is a question of how close one is to what the informants say, or vice versa, how abstract the categories are. In this analysis we have decided to be quite close to what the participants say. The number of categories will also vary depending on the kind of questions asked. The focus of the analysis is: “What
CHAPTER 12. ANALYSIS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

does this person mean by what he or she says?” In what way does he or she relate to each question? It is often possible to sort people’s conceptions into more than one category, which we can here see is more the rule and exceptions in the table of frequencies follow after all the qualitatively different categories.

12.2 Participating teachers and parents

We have conducted a survey in the EASE project where the persons who participate in the different courses have answered a questionnaire, which will be analysed here. But let us first say that in total there are about 300 persons filed from the ECE who participated. From Sweden there are 23, half of them teachers in practice, and the other half teacher students. Many of the teachers in practice had problems to follow the course through depending on luck for support from their headmasters. Because of this we also chose a group of 12 teacher students when they were involved in a course about literacy. In the Swedish analysis we talk about teachers since they all have the same education (3.5 years university degree), although some of them work in pre-schools and others in pre-school-classes.

From Iceland 10 teachers answered the questionnaire; six pre-school teachers and four primary school teachers.

From Greece the questionnaire was answered by five teachers, three of whom were pre-school teachers working with children 4–6 years old, and two were primary school teachers working this year (2009/2010) with first graders, 6–7 years old.

In the Danish EASE project, there were 17 participants and all of them were educated professionals. All of them have participated in a literacy-course, and they also participated in an action research project, in developing a learning story template, literacy indicators and context indicators. And they produced learning stories in their practice. And all of them answered the questionnaires that will be analysed below. The EASE literacy-course was planned as in-service training, and the present municipalities supported the participation. One of the participants was a trained primary school teacher, and practised in primary school. The rest were educated pre-school teachers, and two of them practised in pre-school class. Two practised in leisure time centres and 12 practised in pre-school. But in order to keep the Danish analysis clear and understandable, all participants are named professionals. A group of parents answered the questionnaire as well, and their answers are analysed separately.

The survey in Poland was completed prior to the course by a total of 35 teachers (15 of these were pre-school teachers and 20 primary school teachers). Furthermore, the study included 18 parents. After the course 20 teachers (8 pre-school teachers, and 13 primary school teachers) participated in the study. The questionnaire was additionally completed by 10 parents.

From Austria the questionnaire was given before the courses started; the Austrian sample includes the views of 11 teachers of Kindergarten (Five-years-education as a professional from the countryside [Burgenland]) 11 teachers of primary school (Education at college/university level from the countryside [Burgenland]) 11 parents (middle class from the countryside [Burgenland]) (The education of pre-school teachers lasts 5 years in Austria and is located at a school; primary school teachers are educated at the “Pädagogische Hochschule” (until 2007 “Pädagogische Akademie”) in 6 terms of study.

In Germany the pre-school teachers’ education takes place in vocational training colleges and includes one year of traineeship in pre-schools (Kindertagesstätte) under supervision of teachers. Five vocational training colleges in the region of Cologne participated in the EASE project, in each of them about 15 students participated in the “EASE -courses” and applied their competences to the practical work in the
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pre-schools. It was planned that all of them should have interviewed at least one pre-school teacher, one primary-school teacher and one parent with whom they worked together. In fact, altogether the questionnaire was completed by 159 persons.

12.3 Teachers’ and parents’ perceptions

Here follows a qualitative analysis for the answers of the participants in the EASE courses in our 8 countries, question by question. We will only highlight the most important aspects from each country, and will then in the end make a comparison. Under each heading (the question) the qualitative analysis will be presented first, and after each of these a short description from each country will follow.

12.4 1) What should children be learning in pre-school/1st grade?

We could here distinguish 8 qualitatively different categories. Some of those are close in meaning, but we have anyhow decided to distinguish between for example, social aspects and democracy.

1. **Social aspects**: These could stand for social competence as such or more direct social interaction and cooperation in terms of taking turns in play or communication.

2. **Democracy**: This relates to notions like equality, responsibility for other people, the nature and the world around us (this could be linked to education for sustainable development).

3. **3 Rs**: The focus is here on literacy in a broad sense, like becoming skilled in expressing themselves, listening to and interpreting stories and symbols. There are also expressions of mathematics, like numbers, form and shape, measuring etc. It is here more common that language is focussed on than mathematics.

4. **Individual and personal**: Here a whole conglomerate of aspects is meant, like becoming independent, feeling secure, and safe in their identity, feeling loved, feeling they are good enough as they are and confident in what they are, developing curiosity and getting to know that their interests are valuable.

5. **Knowledge content**: Aspects such as nature, culture or art are referred to here. This can be linked to learning about their neighbourhood, the nature or culture in terms of learning about museums, theatre or cinema, but also about techniques for drawing, painting etc.

6. **Learning**: This illustrates the idea of life-long learning and gets children interested and willing to learn, they enjoy learning and find their own strategies or test hypotheses. This also includes creativity as a main factor for learning.

7. **School readiness**: The idea with pre-school-classes seems to be to ensure a smooth transition to school. And it will help each child if he or she has learnt the things necessary for school, like more self-confidence or being able to take instructions by the teacher.

8. **Motor skills**:

**Austria**: Mostly named by all people: To prepare the children for reading, writing and counting, language skills (also in the mother-tongue), social skills and physical skills. All teachers and pre-school-teachers answered, that working towards the preparation for primary school is the most important content.
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**Denmark:** *Professionals:* 82% focus on social aspects as the most important category, emphasizing solidarity, consideration and ability to care for others. 41% focus on the 3R’s, while 35% focus on school readiness. Democracy, knowledge content and learning are all less then 11%. *Parents:* 100% focus on social aspects as most important and individual and personal capacities as the second most important (50%) content.

**Germany:** All three groups focus on social aspects, the 3Rs and individual and personal development. After the course, learning and school readiness became more important for pre-school and primary-school teachers as well as for parents.

**Greece:** The teacher’s answers before the course as well as after the course differ on the individual level and on the educational level. This means that the three pre-school teachers say, although in a different ranking order, that it is important for the children to develop everyday life-skills, motor skills, and to be prepared for a smooth transition from pre-school to primary school, and to learn about the culture and art. The last point is the only one that was mentioned also by the two primary school teachers in the first questionnaire. The answers of the primary school teachers however differ from those of the pre-school teachers concerning the other points. Concerning the answers after the course the pre-school teachers repeat what they said before the course and add that the children should learn democratic practices and become prepared for the 3Rs. The two primary school teachers agree among themselves concerning their answers to this question in the second questionnaire and with the pre-school teachers concerning what is important for the children to learn in the pre-school but they put them in a different order.

**Hungary:** 40 pedagogues, 40 primary school teachers and 20 parents participate. Almost all respondents (student and kindergarten pedagogues) focus on the 3Rs (12%), school readiness (47%) and motor skills (57%). A change occurs after the course: There is a focus on social aspects as well as individual and personal development. Parents: motor skills (60%), learning (50%), democracy (50%).

**Iceland:** In the beginning of the project most of the pre-school teachers emphasized social development (85%) and individual and personal development (80%). The primary school teachers also focused on social development and democracy (85%) but they also mentioned learning and school readiness. After the course the primary school teachers mentioned learning and the 3Rs as most important and two of the pre-school teachers also mentioned the 3Rs and learning as well.

**Poland:** In the case of the “social aspects” category (1) the results received after the course were the same as those obtained before. 100% of the respondents indicated the need for development of this exact skill. The same is true in the case of the “democracy” category (2). In the remaining categories, differences were observed in responses given by respondents prior to and after the course. After the course, a greater number of respondents, both teachers and parents, indicated a need for “development of reading, writing and arithmetic skills” (3). Furthermore, categories such as “personal skills” (4), “knowledge content” (5), “learning skills” (6), “school readiness” (7) and “motor skills” (8) were indicated far more often by respondents after the completion of the course. This was particularly evident in the case of category (5). Prior to the course this was indicated by only 20% of the pre-school teachers, 70% of the primary school teachers and 39% of the parents, whereas after the course these figures were 75%, 85% and 80% respectively.
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Sweden: Looking at question no 12.4, almost all teachers focus on social aspects, democracy as well as individual and personal development (85%), while about 62% focus on the 3Rs, knowledge content and learning. Less than 10% focus on school readiness. 64% of the teacher students focused on social aspects before the course while 100% after. The other main change for this group was an increase in focusing on the 3Rs and individual and personal development, while no one talked about knowledge content or motor skills.

12.5 2) What are the most important issues?

We can here distinguish 5 categories. These are however equal to the categories above! It was also a question many participants did not answer, it seems like they thought it was similar to the question above.

1. Social skills
2. Literacy enrichments of different kinds, specifically for the immigrant children.
3. Democracy
4. Learning, that is getting children interested, engaged, curious and have them find joy and safety etc.
5. Motor skills
6. All the things said above

Austria: Social and individual skills but also physical exercise are the most important skills for the Austrian participants. So in Austria most people (teachers and parents) see the Kindergarten as a preparation for primary school and for the social dimension it is very important for them. In contrast to the Scandinavian countries, where education to democracy is important for all, in Austria the idea of democracy has a more political meaning.

Denmark: Professionals: 88% focus on social aspects; getting children interested and engaged 46%, but also motor skills and literacy enrichment (both 41%), are mentioned. Parents: Social skills and getting children interested and engaged (both 75%) are important to the parents.

Greece: The answers to the second question are similar to those of the first question but they are more explicit.

Germany: Although social skills are considered to be most important, learning gets a higher importance after the courses.

Iceland: Most of the pre-school teachers saw social issues and democracy as the most important issues in the beginning as well as at the end of the project. Most of the primary school teachers mentioned issues that fall under democracy.

Poland: Both prior and after the course, 100% of the respondents indicated the “social skills” category (1). After the course, far more of the respondents seem to be aware of the fact that apart from the social skills, there are other significant issues such as: supporting linguistic development (2), democracy (3), learning skills (4). Prior to the course, the final category—“all above-mentioned” (6)
was not marked by any of the respondents, whereas after the course this was indicated by 12.5% of pre-school teachers, 15.4% of primary school teachers and 10% of parents.

Sweden: When the teachers talk about what is most important the results are similar to the answers in question 12.4, while the teacher students said that all aspects were equally important.

12.6 3) In what way do you think literacy education can be realized in pre-school?

We have distinguished 5 categories here:

1. Follow the children’s own strategies and challenge them: Teachers talk about how children write in their own ways and they should be allowed to do this by being given support and encouragement, but also being offered situations which will motivate children through their inherent creative potential. It is also a question of arousing the desire in children to become literate by challenging them positively.

2. Language development: This could be related to just using correct language or speaking a lot with the children, but it can also be illustrated by reading a lot of stories to children. Some teachers say that it should not be focused on the alphabet only.

3. Specific aspect of literacy: A very specific aspect mentioned by some teachers is that the function of literacy has to be in the foreground of literacy learning.

4. The physical environment: Here teachers talk about the important role of having an environment where there are texts in all forms, but also where the teacher should act as a role-model by writing visually for children on children’s drawings or the blackboard.

5. Train fine motor skills: This means that children have to become skilful in using their fingers and hand for being good writers, this can be practiced in a lot of every-days tasks.

Austria: The learning-environment is mostly named: it should stimulate the children but (important for teachers and parents) there should be no tasks for the children; “Learning by playing” should be realized.

Denmark: Professionals: 65% focus on following and challenging the children’s own strategies, and give them opportunity to experience the excitement in exploring new phenomena. 46% of the answers focus on language development. And 30% answer that the physical environment is important. Parents: Also the parents (75%) focus on following and challenging the children’s own strategies, 50% on language development and 25% focus on motor skills.

Greece: The two pre-school teachers and one of the primary school teachers reply to the third question that the most important thing is the development of a positive stance towards the literacy education. This means: follow children’s own strategies and challenge them. Also, the three pre-school teachers and one of the primary school teachers answer firstly, that the teacher should act as a role-model by writing visually for children on children’s drawings and secondly, that the physical environment should function like the “third teacher” in the Reggio approach.
CHAPTER 12. ANALYSIS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Germany: “Language development” is in the focus of all three groups but “following the children’s own strategies and challenging them” and “specific aspects of literacy” gain importance for the parents in the out-questionnaire. The physical environment becomes less important for the pre-school teachers after the course.

Iceland: Both pre-school teachers and primary school teachers focused on following the children’s own strategies and language development as an approach to literacy learning.

Poland: In the first questionnaire pre-school teachers focused on the physical environment and the ability to follow the children's own strategies and challenge them is considered to be equally important by pre-school teachers. Language development is being mentioned as the third one of the most important issues. 73% of the pre-school teachers mentioned training motor skills as useful. Primary School teachers are of the opinion that the specific aspect of literacy is not considered as so important in this respect. Primary school teachers considered following children’s own strategies and challenging them as the most important factor. Language development seems to be also very important for this group as well. Primary school teachers pay less attention to: the specific aspect of literacy, the physical environment and training the fine motor skills. Parents say that the children’s own strategies, language development and the specific aspect of literacy are the most important factors. Motor skills are hardly being mentioned. In the second questionnaire all groups (pre-school teachers, primary school teachers and parents) pay most attention to following the children’s own strategies. Additionally 100% of parents considered language development and the specific aspect of literacy as very important. This group pays the least attention to motor skills. Motor skills are being defined as important by 69% of primary school teachers and by 87% of pre-school teachers. Additionally 100% of pre-school teachers mentioned the physical environment as very important. Specific aspects of literacy don’t get much recognition.

Sweden: The teachers mainly (92%) focused on following children’s own strategies as an approach to literacy learning in ECE. Among the teacher students the conceptions changed dramatically after the course. All held the idea following children’s own strategies in the second questionnaire. But they also focused on language development (75%), specific aspects of literacy (50%) and the relevance of the physical environment (50%).

12.7 4) What can early childhood services do to facilitate children’s development in literacy learning?

We can here see 4 categories.

1. To recognise and meet children’s interests: Within this category the teachers talk about respecting each child’s own way of beginning to communicate on paper.

2. The environment: There should be many books available and other kinds of materials, ICT is recognised here as a source and inspiration for literacy development. But also the environment in general is of importance.

3. Communication and interaction: It is of great importance to communicate extensively with children, not just when books are read there has to be a dialogue about the content, but someone
also mentions making texts visible by talking about them. Someone else mentions book talking as a specific model by Chambers aiming at making children aware of language, but also about Big Books!

4. **Work with small groups:** One teacher mentions the importance of working close to children which means that the groups have to be small in order for communication to be possible with all participants on their own level of knowledge. There is also another teacher’s opinion included saying that one has to experiment on each individual child’s level.

**Austria:** “Working together with the parents” and “working professionally” are most answers, although “working professionally” is not defined. Reading with children, reading aloud and having books in the classes, which can be used by the children (most of them with a lot of pictures) are all suitable methods for early literacy education.

**Denmark:** Professionals: 82% focus on communication and interaction, by storytelling, theatre, word-games, singing and rhyming. And 41% focus on the environment. And 24% answer that it is important to recognize and meet children’s interests. Only 6% answer that it is important to work in small groups. Parents: Also the parents (100%) focus on communication and interactions.

**Greece:** To the fourth question the respondents repeat their answers given to the third question but with a different ranking order. Both groups of teachers particularly stress the point that communication and interaction is very important for children’s development in literacy learning, and this development in literacy must take place with appropriately educated teachers in cooperation with actively involved parents.

**Germany:** Whereas in the beginning “communication and interaction” are mainly in the focus of the pre-school teachers, after the course “recognizing and meeting children’s interests” became more important for them as well as for parents and primary school teachers. Also working in small groups is considered more important.

**Hungary:** According to each of the participants the most important categories are: communication (87%) and interaction/work with small group (87%), the recognising and meeting of children’s interests (75%).

**Iceland:** Both pre-school and primary school teachers focused on the environment and communication and interaction. After the course they also mentioned “recognizing and meeting children’s interests”.

**Poland:** Recognising and meeting children’s interests are the most frequently mentioned issues by the pre-school teachers. Working with small groups does not seem to be so important. The most important factors for the primary school teachers are: Working with small groups and the environment. Parents (100%) wish teachers recognised and met children’s interests and 89% of the parents want kids to learn in small groups. There are no differences in the answers the second time.

**Sweden:** Here the teachers mainly focus on the environment (77%) and on recognising and meeting children’s interests (69%) and thirdly on communication and interactions (54%). All the teacher students after the course point at recognising and meeting children’s interests, they also become more aware of the role of communication.
12.8 5) What do you think about making observations and keeping track of children’s learning in early childhood services?

All teachers have a positive attitude towards observation and documentation, also some claim that they have always done so, but how to use it does not seem to be clear to them. We found 6 categories to describe their ideas about observations and documentation.

1. **To know what children can achieve**: This is expressed in many different ways. Some teachers talk about development while others talk about learning.

2. **To become a more professional teacher**: This means that when one as a teacher learns about children’s knowledge, he or she simultaneously learns about her or his own work, and therefore is better prepared to meet or challenge each child.

3. **For communication with parents or transition to pre-school-classes**: The idea is here to make children’s progress in learning visible for parents in the transition process. Visibility is the key word.

4. **For children to become aware of their own learning**: By participating in the documentation process, children will themselves become aware of their achieved learning which is important in Swedish pre-schools.

5. **Good, but lack of time**: Some teachers point to the fact that it takes a lot of time away from something else. And they also state that it has to be part of every-day life, but still it is difficult to carry it out the way they want to.

6. **Nothing negative**: Finally some teachers note clearly that there should be nothing written in the documentation which is negative for the child. This means that the documentation should be done carefully and with respect for each child.

**Austria**: Some teachers (Primary school and pre-school) are afraid, that the observations and keeping track of these observations can be misused: Each child should have the same starting point at the primary school. From the Austrian point of view children (as a result of the questionnaire) up to primary school have a right to be children, to play and to develop without any pressure—maybe this opinion is influenced by the law, that the parents are responsible for education and that school and pre-school only need to support the education of the parents. But there is also a big engagement by pre-school teachers to encourage and strengthen the children’s individuality.

**Denmark**: Professionals: 41 % find the observations good, but they lack time. They see learning stories as a good opportunity to reflect the child’s abilities (18 %), and to anticipate possible problems for the child. They use the observations, both as a pedagogical tool and in dialogue with parents (18 %). Parents: All the parents find that the observations enrich the quality of the dialogue with the professionals (c. 100 %). And the parents are satisfied with the opportunity to follow the children’s progress.

**Greece**: All the five teachers take a positive stance towards observation and documentation, but each of them gives a different meaning to the terms “observation” and “documentation”. They insist, however, that the pre-school and the primary school teachers should have a common understanding and a common frame of observation in order to be able to use it in the same way. In conclusion, we
underline the finding that the responses of the primary school teachers in the second questionnaire have changed dramatically and have converged with those of the pre-school teachers.

**Germany:** After the courses especially the pre-school teachers but also the primary school teachers became more aware of the importance of making observations of children’s learning process to increase their own professionalism. In addition, this supports the dialogue with parents.

**Hungary:** According to each of the participants the most important categories are to know what children can do (75%), to communicate with parents or the transition to pre-school-classes (87%), to become a more professional teacher (62%) and for children to become aware of their own learning (87%).

**Iceland:** The main reason why the teachers said it was important to make observations and keep track of children’s learning was to know what children can do and to become a more professional teacher. This did not change after the course.

**Sweden:** To observe and keep track of children’s learning seems to be important for ECE staff in Sweden, but the main reason given in the questionnaire by the teachers is to use this for becoming a professional teacher (46%), but they also point out as an objective for keeping track, to know what children can achieve (38%) and for getting information to share with parents (38%), as well as for children themselves to become aware of their own learning (38%). 23% of the teachers claim it takes too much time to make systematic observations and documentations. As far as the teacher students are concerned, there is a large change noticeable in their conceptions. In the first questionnaire 58% said it was for knowing what children are able to do, while after the course 100% pointed at becoming a professional teacher as an objective for keeping track of children’s learning.

### 12.9 Comparison between the different countries

To make a comparison between the counties becomes quite difficult, since as you can see in the table below, the number of participants from the different countries varies from 9 to 100. It will also become complicated if there should be a comparison on the statistical level between the first and second questionnaire, which also varies in numbers. Another reason for the difficulties of a comparison is the fact that the teachers or pedagogues working in Early Childhood Education have completed their training at various educational levels, from not at all to a university degree.

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But let us instead see what the trends in their perspectives are, and what change is possible to trace. One can see a slight difference between countries where the focus lies on school readiness towards countries where school readiness is not an issue, but social aspects and the 3Rs are focused on when working...
with literacy in pre-school. When methods for working with literacy come up, there is on the one hand how children should train motor skills to just follow children and their strategies. Also the question of what pre-school can do to influence literacy varies in importance in different countries, from focussing on artefacts like books and the environment to communication and children’s own strategies. Also the answers to the question of the use of documentation show various attitudes, from a hesitation towards evaluating children’s knowledge to the consideration as a tool for the professionals’ development.

There seems to be an effect of the courses, although the length and dept of them varies. It looks as if the teachers become more aware of what literacy can be in early years, and that they see the child more clearly and his or her own strategies and the importance of following the child’s initiatives. Maybe Sweden, Denmark and Iceland are the countries changing the least, which may be due to the fact that there are very well anchored perspectives of a child-centred pedagogy (Sommer, Pramling Samuelsson, & Hundeide, 2010).
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