

Role of Early Childhood Education in Positive Transition/Introduction Outcomes for New Pupils



Erasmus+



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INTRODUCTION

The RECEPTION project is a 3 year programme of research and development in early years education. The work is being done by 6 partner institutions in Denmark, Croatia, Ireland, Iceland, Greece and Norway. All the partners are involved in primary and pre-school education as primary schools, kindergartens, educational centres, or government departments of education.

We focus on what we have termed the Reception Challenge: a need for primary schools in all European countries to address the diversity of children's social and educational preparation for the first year of full-time compulsory education. This, of course, is often called the Reception year.

More specifically, a wealth of research and evidence indicates that (a) educational disengagement and under-achievement in secondary education is significantly related to children's experience and attainment in early years education; (b) children enter primary school with very diverse pre-school experience and readiness; (c) this diversity has increased as recent patterns of migration within the EU, and from outside the EU, have added to longer-standing educational disadvantage, marginalised minority groups, and children with special educational needs.

The RECEPTION project aims to investigate, demonstrate and disseminate successful attempts by our partner institutions to address the Reception Challenge within a wide European range of demographic and socio-economic contexts and educational systems, e.g. the extent and availability of support and resources for children and teachers at home and within schools; local variations in kindergarten provision; and the needs of diverse groups of children and their families. Our children often come from disadvantaged groups, many from migrant, Traveller and Roma communities, and some have special educational needs.

The ultimate beneficiaries of our project, we hope, are children across the whole European area whose early years experience makes them more likely to realise their full potential in their subsequent education. Our immediate target groups are the teachers, school leaders, educational advisors, policy communities and related professionals who are responsible for helping those children into Early Years Education and through it. Through the RECEPTION project we aim to develop and disseminate a range of training materials, resources, and ideas which will help to meet our target groups' needs for training and support in addressing the RECEPTION challenge. We aim to present these within:

1. a 5 day residential training course and associated RECEPTION handbook which can also constitute an online/blended learning module for target groups members to use for themselves or for the training and support of other colleagues within their own and related institutions
2. a RECEPTION Resource Pack of materials and resources for the implementation of policies and initiatives for meeting the Reception Challenge, renewable and adaptable to the particular circumstances and needs of our target group members throughout the European area.

Together, the training course, the handbook and the resource pack cover the following broad areas:

1. RECEPTION issues and strategies in each of the 6 partner countries; difference and similarities in their socio-economic contexts and educational systems, and the RECEPTION needs of their diverse groups of children
2. Documented case studies of "best RECEPTION practice" from each partner country, illustrated by filmed examples and analysis
3. Wider European perspectives on major issues, policies, and strategies in RECEPTION policy and practice in the course delegates' own countries and institutions.



The handbook and programme for this particular course draw substantially upon each partners' initial "state of the art" reports and their subsequent case studies.

Our state of the art reports focussed upon current RECEPTION policies, issues, strategies and initiatives within each partner's educational systems and socio-economic contexts, nationally and locally. They provided the focus for each partner's subsequent case studies of a single initiative or a range of related initiatives within their own institutions. The case studies took place mainly over the last school year, 2017-8. They attempt to demonstrate and analyse examples of what appear to be "best RECEPTION practice". Typically, the case-studies focus upon facilitating children's transition from pre-school to the first year of compulsory primary education in order to provide them with better life-chances for their subsequent educational experience and achievement. These studies are intended to contribute collectively to a better understanding of "What works, Where, and Why?" in meeting the Reception Challenge.

Ireland – State of the Art Report

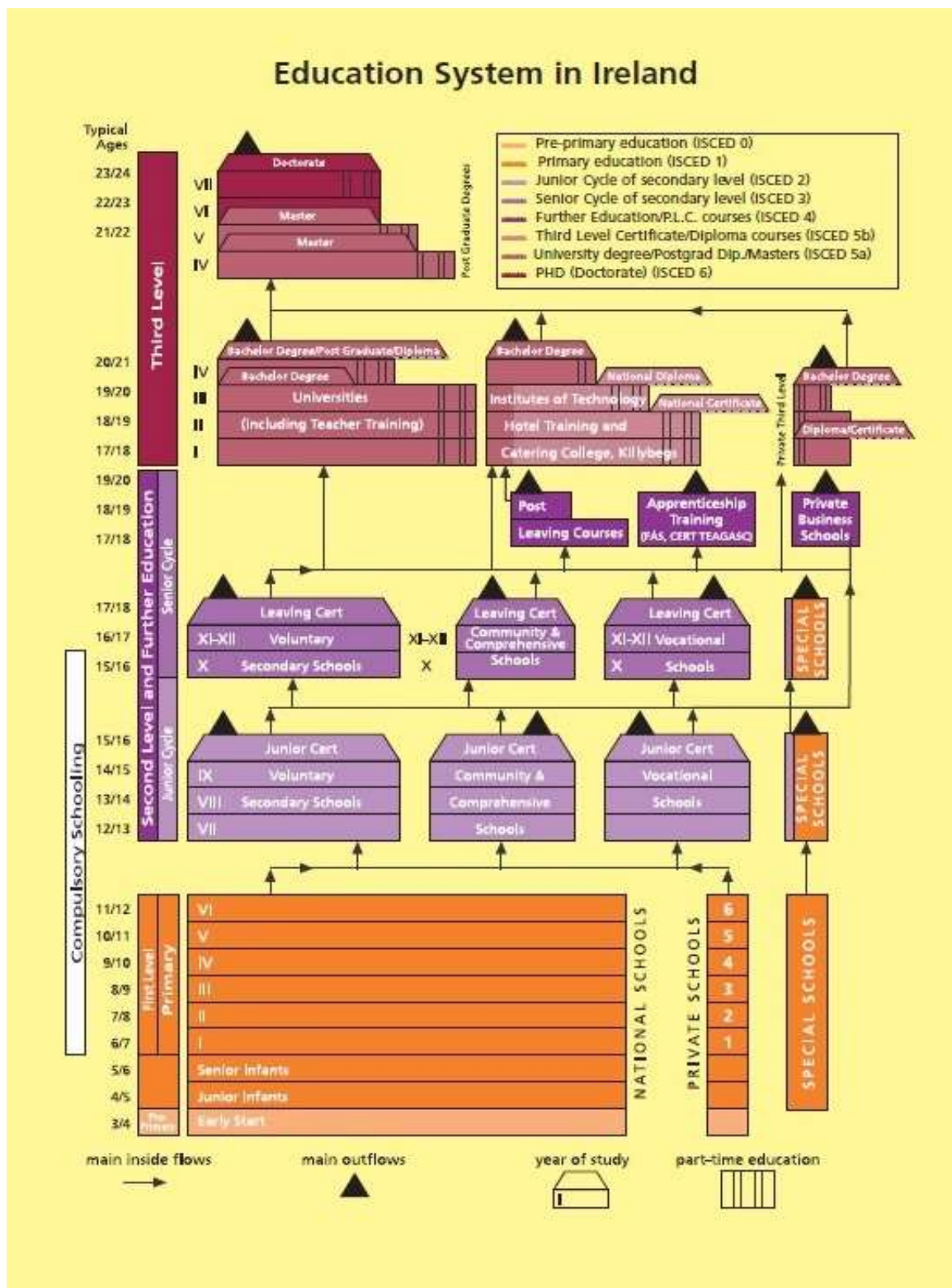
The Educational System in Ireland 2018

Education in Ireland is compulsory from age 6 to 16 or until students have completed three years of second level (post-primary) education. Since 2015, the Irish government has provided funding for two years of preschool education for children aged three to five years. First level schools (primary schools) may accept children on or after their fourth birthday. The majority of primary schools are state funded but are privately owned, the majority by the Catholic Church. The typical primary school enrolls pupils by age into eight year-groups or classes, ranging from junior infants to sixth class. The curriculum followed is a child-centred one and prescribed by the Department of Education although it allows for flexibility in timetabling and teaching methods.

The great majority of pupils transfer to second level school when they have completed the full first level course – generally at about 12 years of age. For registration in a second level school, students must be aged 12 on 1st of January in the first year of attendance.

The second level education sector comprises secondary, vocational, community and comprehensive schools. While each category of school evolved from a distinctive historical context, and have different ownership and management structures, they have a great deal in common. They are largely State funded and follow the same State prescribed curriculum and take the same State public examinations. The second level school (secondary school) span is predominantly a six-year cycle, taken by ages 12 to 18, Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle. Apart from internal school tests, there are two key public examinations taken by students – the Junior Certificate (age 15/16) and the Leaving Certificate (age 17/18). These are external examinations set by the State Examinations Commission. A great deal of public attention is focused on the Leaving Certificate Examination, as entry to third level education is closely linked to the results achieved by students at this examination.

Third level education in Ireland is provided mainly by universities, institutes of technology and colleges of education. In addition, a number of other third level institutions provide specialist education in a number of professions such as medicine and law. Most third level education institutions are supported very substantially by the State. For young people and adults who have left education early or without adequate qualifications, second-chance and alternative programmes are available. Adult, further and community education all have a role to play in providing second-chance education opportunities, addressing skills needs and promoting equality and social inclusion.



Current Developments in Early Years Education in Ireland

Historically, children in Ireland have had a low level of participation in centre-based care and education, with provision largely operating through private crèches and child minders and a small number of community-based providers serving more socio-economically disadvantaged populations. Recent years have seen a sea-change in the policy landscape. The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme was introduced in January 2010 to provide children between three years three months and four years six months with access to a funded preschool year (15 hours per week) of programme-based activities. When first introduced, children qualified for one school year, with an extension in coverage after September 2016. From September 2018, children will be able to start the scheme from two years and eight months old until the transfer to primary school. In addition, Budget 2018 saw the introduction of the Affordable Childcare Scheme, which provides a non-means-tested subsidy to contribute towards childcare costs before participation in the ECCE scheme, with means tested supports to cover provision for children up to 15 years of age.

Síolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education, was published in 2006. It was designed to support quality improvement across all ECCE settings for children from birth to six years of age. The Síolta manual, updated in 2017 (Department of Education and Skills, 2017), is designed to support providers in engaging in ongoing quality improvement and planning. Its key principles centre on the value of early childhood, a children-first philosophy, the importance of parental involvement, teamwork, a holistic approach to pedagogy and the centrality of play in children's development. A related development has been an increasing focus on the nature, content and pedagogy of early years learning. Aistear, an early years' curriculum framework covering children from birth to six years of age, was introduced by the NCCA in 2009. Aistear has four themes – wellbeing, identity and belonging, communicating, and exploring and thinking – and cover the full range of settings, from the child's own home to preschool and primary school provision. The framework plays a strong emphasis on the importance of play in children's learning and development as well on the quality of relationships and interactions with adults and other children and the importance of a language-rich environment.

Work is currently underway at the NCCA on the development of templates to facilitate the exchange of information between early years' providers and primary schools, hence enhancing the continuity of experience across the transition process

Primary Schools

Curriculum

The primary curriculum is itself changing with the recent introduction of a new language curriculum and, at the time of writing, work is underway on a new mathematics curriculum, as well as broader efforts to review and redevelop the full primary curriculum. Curriculum reflects a nation's values and priorities. Curriculum informs the process of teaching and learning in schools and underpins the educational experience of pupils in schools. Developing curriculum is not a simple process as what is important to include in curriculum is often contested with different issues attracting attention at different times. The following quotation illustrates this complexity:

The school curriculum expresses a nation's aspirations for its next generations. The curriculum must strike a balance between developing young people's understanding of their national history and culture and preparing them for a future that is increasingly global and largely unpredictable. What constitutes essential school learning will always be contested because behind it is a debate about what knowledge is of most worth. Curriculum stirs the passion- and that is a good thing. Curriculum is never completed. It is never perfect and should always be a work in progress. As responsible citizens, we are obliged to provide our future generations with the best possible opportunities and outcomes (McGaw 2014 cited in Looney, 2014 p.10)

The Primary School Curriculum was published in 1999 and is now 19 years old. After a process of review, research and consultation, in November 2010, the Department of Education and Skills published a draft national plan for improving literacy and numeracy. The Literacy and Numeracy Strategy contained a number of recommendations in relation to curriculum. In the first instance, the strategy recommended that primary teachers increase the amount of time spent on literacy and numeracy, using their discretion time and by integrating literacy and numeracy across the curriculum, a direction that was issued to schools in Circular 56/2011. The strategy also recommended that the primary curriculum for language (English and Irish) and mathematics be reviewed and complemented by the provision of examples of children's work and learning that illustrated what learning outcomes mean in practice. It was acknowledged in the strategy that approaches to literacy and numeracy in the infant classes needed to be revised to bring them in to line with the teaching and learning approaches advocated in Aistear.

Language Curriculum

In light of the curriculum review reports (NCCA, 2005; 2009; DES, 2005) and the recommendations in the literacy and numeracy strategy, the NCCA set about revising the language curriculum. In keeping with NCCA view of a “developing curriculum” and their responsibility under the Education Act (1998) for curriculum review, a draft of the Revised Language Curriculum for Primary schools was made available for public consultation in April 2014. NCCA's approach to consultation through the use of Twitter, email, and surveys has been inclusive, enabling a wide audience to participate and offer views on curriculum development. This is an acknowledgement of the need to respond to “new research and development in children's language learning, reflect a range of developments and current perspectives. In the revised language curriculum, Junior and Senior Infants are collectively referred to as Stage 1; First and Second classes are Stage 2. Learning outcomes for each stage are presented along a Progression Continua, which indicate key milestones on the learning path through each of the strands. The online presentation of the curriculum allows teacher access to a wide range of resources – podcasts, video links, sharing of lesson plans, and tip sheets, as well as giving users a navigable and accessible resource to allow them “to plot their own route as their needs determine” (English, 2014, p.79). The Primary Language Curriculum is composed of a first and second language curriculum (L1 and L2). The L1, either Irish or English, is determined by the language teaching and learning context of the school. The L1 outcomes are similar in 10 both English and Irish. The L2—Irish or English—follows the same continuum of learning as the L1 but the level at which curriculum outcomes are attained is complex and varies due to experience with and exposure to the language. In this language curriculum for Stages 1 and 2 (Junior Infants to Second Class) the common curriculum specification for L1 and L2 means that integration within a specific language, between languages and across the curriculum is explicitly identified, and that language learning is not compartmentalised. The curriculum outlines the rationale and aims of the curriculum and describes the learning outcomes, supported by progression continua. The revised language curriculum seeks to reduce the overload associated with the 1999 curriculum, by including fewer learning outcomes than there are content objectives in the current curriculum. A learning outcomes approach to curriculum is a new departure for primary schools in Ireland. Therefore, how a learning outcomes approach works in primary schools will need to be monitored and evaluated as part of the implementation process of the revised language curriculum.



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Norway/Luster – State of the Art Report



Photo © The Municipality of Luster

Role of Early Childhood Education in Positive Transition / Induction Outcomes for New pupils

1. Education in Norway

Universal schooling for children was introduced in Norway 250 years ago. From 1889, seven years of compulsory education were provided; in 1969 this was increased to nine years and in 1997 to 10 years.

Education for all is a basic precept of Norwegian educational policy, as stated in the Norwegian Education Act of 1998 with Regulations and later amendments. Children and young people must have an equal right to education, regardless of where they live, gender, social and cultural background or any special needs. All public education in Norway is free of charge, while kindergartens have parental fees.

Private education is not very common, particularly not on primary and lower secondary level. Private schools should be based on pedagogical ideas or religion to be accepted. The typical private school in Norway is either Rudolf Steiner, Montessori or Christianity based. The law does not allow private schools to take out profit.

Education is organised in a lifelong learning perspective to meet changes in society constructively. This perspective is also the framework for the current National Curriculum LK06 - Kunnskapsløftet ("The Knowledge Promotion", 2006 with latest amendments Aug. 2013). "The Knowledge Promotion" is the latest reform in the 10-year compulsory school and in upper secondary education and training. It introduces certain changes in substance, structure and organisation from the first grade in the 10-year compulsory school to the last grade in upper secondary education and training.

Transitions between the different levels in the education system has been defined as a challenge, and currently efforts are being made to make the transitions smoother, e.g. through better sharing of information and methods across levels.



Field trip with the coming first graders

Below you will find a basic survey of the main stages of the public Norwegian system of education. A full overview can be found in the report [Facts about education in Norway 2016 – key figures 2014](#) (Statistisk sentralbyrå/Statistics Norway, 2016). Private schools must also be run after the same principles.

KINDERGARTENS should, according to the Kindergarten Act of 2005, be pedagogical undertakings for children under compulsory school age. In 2009 an individual, legal right to a place in a kindergarten institution was introduced.

PRIMARY AND LOWER SECONDARY EDUCATION covers education for children aged 6 to 15 and grades 1 to 10. Local authorities are required to offer before and after school care for pupils in grades 1 to 4.

UPPER SECONDARY EDUCATION normally provides three years of general education or four years of vocational training after the 10-year compulsory education. The norm for apprenticeship training is two years of vocational training in upper secondary education followed by one or two years of practical training in industry.

TERTIARY VOCATIONAL PROGRAMMES are post-secondary, but are not defined as higher education. The duration is a minimum of six months and a maximum of two years.

HIGHER EDUCATION is based on general admission, normally completed secondary education. The main structure is a 3+2+3 model with three-year bachelor's degree, two-year master's degree and three-year doctoral programs

ADULT EDUCATION includes adult education at primary, lower secondary and upper secondary level, folk high schools, adult education associations and independent distance learning institutions.

2. Education in Luster

Kindergartens and schools in Luster follow the same pattern and are subject to the same laws and regulations as the national system described above. The municipality is responsible for education in kindergarten, primary and lower secondary schools, as well as adult education. There are approx. 660

pupils in the age group 6-16 in the municipality. There are no private kindergartens or schools in Luster. The nearest upper secondary school lies in the neighbouring municipality of Sogndal.

The table below shows the different kindergarten and schools in Luster:

Level	Public	Private
Kindergarten	9	0
Primary	8	0
Lower secondary	2	0

In Luster there are six schools with composite classes / multi-aged classrooms and three larger schools. Five of the schools with composite classes are organized as oppvekstsenter – so-called Centres of Growing-Up – with both a kindergarten and a school. The principal at these Centres of Growing-Up also leads the kindergarten division in addition to the school

3. Early Years Approach in Norway

Pre-school day care centres / Kindergarten

Kindergartens in Norway are for children up to the age of 5 years and are integrated into the national educational system. While enrollment in kindergartens is optional, education for all children over the age of six years is compulsory. A keystone of Norwegian educational policy is that children and young people have an equal right to education, regardless of where they live, gender, social and cultural background or any special needs. All public education in Norway is free of charge, while kindergartens have parental fees. Kindergarten in today's Norwegian society is viewed as beneficial for all children. Consequently, nearly all children growing up in Norway have been enrolled in kindergartens. This is also the case in Luster where usually more than 90 % of the children 1 – 6 year are enrolled in kindergarten.

The Kindergarten Act amended in 2005 has strict regulations for how kindergarten as an institution are to be staffed and operated. In 2006 The Ministry of Education and Research laid down regulations providing a framework for the content and tasks of kindergartens. This was later amended in 2011. The Framework Plan has seven learning areas that children should be acquainted with in kindergartens:

- *Communication, language and text*
- *Body, movement and health*
- *Art, culture and creativity*
- *Nature, environment and technology*
- *Ethics, religion and philosophy*
- *Local community and society*
- *Numbers, spaces and shapes*

There is a double challenge of seeking to ensure the children's possibilities for play while also having regulations for adult-led activities with pedagogical aims.

The Ministry of Education and Research has announced that there will come a new framework for content and tasks in kindergarten during early 2017.

Primary school grade 1.-4.

In Norway children starts school the year they are six years old. School is compulsory. The school year begin in August and ends in June. The school year is defined to be 190 school days long, 38 weeks. In primary school the pupils have these subjects: Norwegian, Maths, English, Natural Science, Social Science (includes History and Geography), Arts and crafts, Music, Physical Education, Christianity, Religion and Ethics Education (CREE), Food and Health.

In the subject curricula five core skills are integrated in a way that is adapted to each subject from 1th to 10th grade. These skills are: Being able to read, being able to express oneself orally, being able to express oneself in writing, being able to develop numeracy and being able to use digital tools.

The Curriculum for Knowledge Promotion (2006 with latest amendment 2013) defines attainment as the ability to solve problems and master complex challenges. Pupils demonstrate their attainment in specific situations by applying their knowledge and skills when solving problems. The attainment targets describe what the pupils should be able to master after completing a given year of study. In Primary School it is after grade 2 and grade 4. The combined attainment targets form the basis for assessing the pupils' attainment in the subject. The pupils will reach the attainment targets to varying degrees.

Challenges in the educational system

Weaknesses in the education system are reflected in systematic differences in participation and learning outcome between children, young people and adults with different family backgrounds and between girls and boys. An aspect of the latter is that there are major differences in reading skills in favor of girls according to the latest PISA results (2015). This is the same pattern that also are visible in the other Nordic countries and in the OECD average.

To achieve the goal of greater social equalisation, all children and adolescents must be included in good learning processes as early as possible and be given an education which encourages achievement and a good learning outcome. Early intervention is also necessary to be able to provide adapted education for all pupils.

4. Early Years in Luster

The different characteristics and strong sides to Early Years in Luster are described in short below:

Transition kindergarten – Primary School

An effective and successful transition between kindergarten and Primary School is important both for the children themselves, their parents and for the teacher / teachers and school who take over the responsibility for the learners. The transition has several elements; one aspect is the adjustment to a new environment, new classmates, new adults and being in a school instead of kindergarten. Another aspect is the transfer of information about the child between the two organizations.

In Luster there are specific procedures for how this transition should be with certain obligatory activities that intend to make the kindergarten-children feel more secure about the transition. These procedures includes the 6-years old in the kindergarten doing activities together to get to know each other better, visits to the school the children will attend, doing activities together with the pupils at the school, e.g. short hiking trips together, Christmas arts-and-crafts-activities, cultural events etc.

At the five Centres of Growing-Up in Luster which have a kindergarten-division and a school-division the transition is more naturally integrated as the children already belong to the same organization. The kindergarten-building and the school-building is very close and the children have regular meeting points through common activities and breaks. A common activity is for instance that the school children reads for the children in kindergarten on a regular basis.

Several of the teachers in the schools' staff also have experience and formal educational background from pre-school. In Norway kindergarten teachers qualify to work as teachers in grade 1.-4. if they fulfill some formal requirements regarding further education. Often the assistant teachers have a combined position

both in kindergarten and in the school of the Centres of Growing-up and this is obviously an advantage as the grown-ups know the children well when they start school.

Early Years challenges in Luster

The description on the previous pages addresses some specific characteristics regarding Early Years education in Luster. In sum these characteristics constitute a solid base for how to support the youngest learners in school and give them a good start in their school careers. The challenges identified to the Norwegian school system also applies to Luster: differences in learning outcome from the school system depending on social background and differences between girls and boys – especially regarding reading skills.

When it comes to the local Early Years challenges in Luster they can be divided into two aspects. One aspect is related to improving existing practices and existing measures and making sure that the intentions, transition and plans for Early Years are followed up in all schools in the municipality. Networks for teachers and kindergarten teachers, tighter local collaboration between kindergarten and school, monthly meetings between the principals and the local education authority in addition to improved local procedures is an answer to this ongoing challenge.

The other aspect is about more distinct academic or even practical challenges. Examples of such challenges are reading (How can the schools in Luster improve the practice for learning how to read in an even more systematic way in grade 1-3? What can the schools do to reduce the gap between boys and girls reading skills from grade 1 and onward?) and home-school-partnership (How can the schools improve the collaboration with the parents regarding early intervention? How can the schools improve their information to the parents about the systems for Early Years-education?) Improving Early Years education is about continuously making small steps of progress in classroom practice, reflecting upon procedures and structures and always having children's best as lodestar.

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Croatia – State of the Art Report

Authors: Martina Bajzec, Sanja Knezić, Tatjana Kontent, Ines Krušelj-Vidas, Marina Mikulec, Bernarda Razum

Date: November 2016.

Location: Elementary school Matije Gupca, Gornja Stubica



1. Croatia - National and Regional Context

The Republic of Croatia – general overview

The Republic of Croatia is EU country located in Central and Southeast Europe. The country has a population of 4 284 889 (2011.). The ethnic structure of the population of the Republic of Croatia - the majority are Croats 90,4% and other populations include ethnic groups: Serb (4,36%), Muslim, Slovenian, Italian, Czech, Slovakian, Albanian. Among European countries, Croatia has one of the most marked and longest traditions of emigration to European and more distant destinations. Apart from the decreasing population, the contemporary demographic picture of Croatia is much like those of the other members of the EU. It is characterised by three processes: ageing, natural depopulation, and spatial polarisation of the population.

The main economic branches in the country are determined by natural resources, but also by technology and industry (shipbuilding, construction, petrochemicals, the food industry). The most important branch of the economy is tourism.

It is important to point out that the Croatian government only spends 4% of its GDP on education, well below the European average.

The subdivisions of Croatia on the first level are the 20 counties and Zagreb city-county.

A unitary state, Croatia is a republic governed under a parliamentary system. Government powers in Croatia are divided into legislative, executive and judiciary powers. The President of the Republic is the head of state, directly elected to a five-year term.

Gornja Stubica

Gornja Stubica is a municipality on the north-western slopes of Medvednica Mountain in the Krapina-Zagorje County. The municipality of Gornja Stubica has 50 km² and there are 20 villages and settlements. It has a population of cca 5 300 inhabitants. It is famous for the church of St. George and 450 years old linden tree of Matija Gubec which for the residents of the area is the symbol of peasant up-rise and indestructibility. On the place of the medieval castle today stands a baroque castle Oršić where “The museum of peasants’ rebellions” is settled, which is the most important cultural site.

It is mostly rural area without clear agriculture vision and politics. There were mostly economic reasons which motivated people in the past and today to move to nearby towns and even out of Croatia. Problem of a ‘brain drain’ is also present. Therefore, decreasing number of pupils has been recorded in ES Matije Gupca Gornja Stubica for the past several years.

2. The education system in the Republic of Croatia

The education system in the Republic of Croatia consists of the following: preschool education, elementary education, secondary education, higher education and adult education (The Educational system in the Republic of Croatia , 2015).

Preschool education

Local authorities are required to organize preschool education. Kindergartens have parental fees and are not obligatory, but preschool (one year before the school) is compulsory for all children who do not attend kindergarten and are free of charge. In kindergarten, children are incorporated into full-day or shorter programme of education, health care, nutrition and social welfare, from the age of six months until going to school.

The basic structure of the pre-school curriculum is divided into three large categories in which children acquire abilities: I (the image of oneself), I and others (family, other children, the immediate social community, kindergarten, and the local community), the world around me (the natural and the wider social environment, cultural heritage, and sustainable development).

Elementary education

Eight-year elementary education in the Republic of Croatia is compulsory and free of charge for all children at the age of seven to fifteen and for students with multiple disabilities it lasts longer but not longer than the age of 21. The purpose and goals of primary education are focused on the continuous development of students as spiritual, moral, intellectual and social beings in accordance with their abilities and inclinations. The existing network of primary schools provides all children in the territory of the Republic of Croatia the possibility of their primary schooling.

All public schools have to organize their work according to National Curriculum Framework. The National Curriculum Framework has three parts: core curriculum, differentiated curriculum and school curriculum. The core curriculum through which students acquire key competences in primary school is identical and compulsory for all students, except for those with difficulties. The differentiated curriculum in primary school is a cluster of optional subjects offered to students at the national and/or school level. The school curriculum includes non-compulsory subjects, modules and other educational programmes, supplementary classes, additional/remedial instruction, school projects, class projects, group projects, excursions, trips, and extracurricular and extramural activities. In this area schools could develop their "tailor made" projects for their own students' needs and interests, local situation.

Croatian primary school education is divided into two parts. The first part is so called „class teaching“ where children have a class teacher who teaches all the subjects except foreign languages and religious education (elective subject). The other part is so called „subject teaching“ where children have a different teacher for each subject. This part also lasts for four years (from the 5th to the 8th grade).

Secondary education

The right of enrolment into the first year of secondary education have all students on equal terms, but within the number of places established by the decision on enrolment for each school year, which has been passed by the Minister of Education annually. Students can enrol to the schools according to grades they had in elementary school. Secondary education institutions are, depending on the type of educational programme, divided into high schools, vocational and artistic secondary schools.

Higher education

Activities of higher education in the Republic of Croatia are implemented by universities, polytechnics and schools for professional higher education with all its constituents. Croatia joined the Bologna process in 2001 and all students ending “Bologna” study receive ETCS points and have right to receive Diploma Supplement.

Adult education

Adult education system comprises the entire process of learning intended for achieving rights on development of personality, teaching for employability: the acquisition of qualifications for the first profession, retraining, acquiring and developing professional knowledge, skills, competencies and teaching for active citizenship.

According to the Act and other regulations, adult education programmes can be implemented by institutions that are registered for the field of adult education.

3. Educational context in Gornja Stubica

The only educational institution in Gornja Stubica is ES Matije Gupca Gornja Stubica.

Pre-school

Only 10% of pre-school population in Gornja Stubica attend kindergarten programme because there is no kindergarten in Gornja Stubica (the nearest one is in Donja Stubica). Most of the children are being looked after at home by grandparents or parents who are not employed. The majority of children from Gornja Stubica attend organized pre-school programme in the ES Matije Gupca, lasting 250 hours in the main school and 150 hours in 4 satellite schools which is implemented by one pre-school teacher. The classes are held twice a week during the school year from 1st October to 31st May in 6 groups consisting of 3 to 15 children. Some children come to pre-school with poorly developed hygienic habits, unaccustomed to sharing toys or postponement of satisfying their own needs. Some of them do not know how to dress themselves or put on their shoes. Some have problems with separation from their parents. Solving these problems is the primary focus point in the pre-school programme. The second step is the focus on the development of the skills necessary for starting education.

Elementary school Matije Gupca Gornja Stubica

All together 379 pupils have been enrolled into the school year 2016/2017; 319 out of them attend the main school. They are divided into 8 classes from the 1st to the 4th grade (2 classes per each grade) and into 10 classes from the 5th to the 8th grade (2 classes for the fifth and the sixth graders and 3 classes for the seventh and the eighth graders). There is also a special class for children with disabilities.

There are also four satellite schools in Gornja Stubica. There are 60 pupils altogether from the 1st to the 4th grade in four villages Dubovec, Dobri Zdenci, Hum Stubički and Sveti Matej.

The staff is made of 41 teachers (16 class teachers and 25 subject teachers), 2 professional associates, 13 members of administrative and technical staff (a secretary, an accountant, a cook, cleaning ladies and janitors), a pre-school teacher and a headmistress.

In the main school building there is a school library, a media library, a canteen, a gym of 500 m², a school playground and the old school building is also in use.

Each classroom has Internet access, a computer, a projector and a projection screen.

School curriculum is rich in content and it tries to enrich the experiences of children with contents they cannot get in their families. But unfortunately, many initiatives have been left out due to the lack of material resources and lower socio-economic status of the families' children come from.

4. Readiness for school

The legal framework

Children are eligible to start elementary school in Croatia if they turn 6 years by the first of April of the current year. Screening procedure for children about to start school is implemented by School committee for estimating children's readiness for going to school: psychologist or educationist or teacher of special education (one person – not all experts are present in each school), school doctor, class teacher and Croatian language teacher.

County Office determines the list of children who are obligatory to attend school which is then sent to the School committee. Each child individually goes through the process of assessment through interaction and communication with the child, talking to the parents, review of all the documents of other institutions that the child may have, as well as the medical examination.

Physical maturity of a child is being determined by a school doctor by a general medical examination.

Intellectual maturity is visible through a variety of different segments. The speech of a child is being assessed (its fluency, making of sentences, vocabulary, pronunciation flaws), orientation in time and space, the ability to memorise, how long deliberate attention can last, the ability to concentrate, logical mathematical intelligence, the development of pre-reading abilities, fine and gross motor skills development. Intellectual maturity is being assessed based on pre-prepared standardized questionnaires.

Emotional and social maturity means that a child is ready to be separated from parents, to be included into interaction with his/her peers as well as with adults; the ability to postpone the satisfaction of their own needs, certain level of tolerance to frustration, to have socially acceptable ways of behaviour and developed hygienic habits.

These segments of the development of a child are impossible to notice during the short one-term individual interaction with a child so the information of observations of pre-school or kindergarten institutions that a child had been attending are very useful. These data can be got from parents themselves but have to be treated carefully because of the parents' subjective perspective. Sometimes parents even hide the information that they think could be aggravating for their children.

The number of children in classes can vary from 14 to 28. The number of children in combined classes is different; 13 pupils can be in one combined class of two different grades. If the number of students is less than 13 then there is one combined class with one teacher and the pupils can be from three or even four different grades incorporated in this one class. If the number of pupils in combined class is 17, then the class is divided into two separate classes with two different teachers for each class.

Local situation in Gornja Stubica

School committee for estimating children's readiness for going to school in ES Matije Gupca Gornja Stubica consists of a school doctor, an educationist, class teachers who will teach those first graders and a Croatian language teacher (mother tongue teacher).

There are great differences in children's readiness for going to school. Some children are fluent and independent readers, others do not see the difference between letters and numbers. The development of reading skills may be delayed because of speaking impediments. 30% of children entering the education system have certain problems in pronunciation. Unfortunately, there is not enough comprehensive systematic support of speech therapist in our area and only a small number of school and pre-school children attend the speech therapy treatment. In recent years it has been noticed that there is an increase in articulation difficulties, speaking impediments and underdeveloped speech in pre-school population.



There are also problems in coordination and the whole body motor skills as well as the fine motor skills of a hand needed for writing. The increasing difficulty is in maintaining concentration during lessons and implementing activities from the beginning to the end of a lesson which is observed during pre-school programme.

For a small number of children (8-13%) enrolment is delayed due to their immaturity. Those children are required to attend a pre-school programme during one more school year.

Transition activities and practices in ES Matije Gupca Gornja Stubica

Although most of transition actions are based on school-determined content, practices are undertaken for supporting children to adapt to school process.

Actually, the whole pre-school programme prepares children for the first grade of primary school. Due to the fact that pre-school education is organized in all school buildings, children are familiarized with the interior, included in the social and cultural activities planned by the school curriculum throughout the whole school year. Before the beginning of the school year parent meeting is organized for the 1st graders where parents become familiarised with the plan and programme of work in the first grade, they get a clear information about existing routines and expectations, about the required material and equipment and they can ask all the questions they have.

Traditional „Welcome to school“ programme with a short play prepared by school drama group is organized for the first graders and their parents on the first day of school. Timetables are adjusted for the first day and the first week of school.

Effective practices are being continued in the 1st class because the transition process has not been finished just by the official start of the 1st grade. Students can take part in many school curricular activities which help them to fulfil their interests. Especially during the first term of the school year, teaching and learning is organized around understanding of early childhood pedagogies. Teachers use so called recreational breaks, and there is a project led by school librarian called The box full of feelings focused on developing oral language expression and reading competence.

Erasmus+ RECEPTION project is an opportunity for ES Matije Gupca Gornja Stubica to step forward in the direction to improve the ability of the school team to appropriately accept the children of widely differing degrees of school readiness.



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Denmark – State of the Art Report

December 2016

National level

The challenge for the “Folkeskole” is always how to give the pupils/students enough resilience to do as well as they can in our school system. We will of course look on how every child can have the best, safe and clear transition from the kindergarten to the way the school system works. It is important to look at the best way so that every child can understand the rules of a school day, how to be a pupil, be a part of an education and experience that the focus is on their well-being as a positive starting point.

Denmark has a long tradition with what we call the “Folkeskole”. The description for our school system contains the vision and present aims and ideals – guidelines for the daily life and work on every “Folkeskole”.

§ 1. The school must in cooperation with the parents give the student’s knowledge and skills, that will prepare them for further education and make them want to learn more, make them aware of the Danish culture and history, other countries and cultures so that they understand the interaction between peoples, nature and promote every single student’s versatile development.

Nr.2. The school must develop method’s and create frames for experience, contemplation and enthusiasm, so that the student’s develop recognition, fantasy and trust toward their own possibilities and ways of thinking and to take action.

3. The Danish school must prepare the student’s to participate, share responsibility, human rights and duties in a society with freedom and democracy. The school is characterized by freedom, equality and democracy.

© Ministeriet for Børn, Unge og Ligestilling/ The ministry for children education and gender equality.

The Danish “Folkeskole” is a public school. We have other kinds of schools for example schools for children with special needs and many kinds of private schools. The public schools have their own management with a head teacher and participate in a local co-operation in the municipality. The special schools have a strong connection to the municipality but also to the region.

In connection to all the schools we have a afterschool arrangement called SFO, that takes care of the students from the school. This public school cost nothing while the afterschool is paid for by the parents.

The afterschool is a part of the “Folkeskole” and therefore is administered by the parent’s school board

The staff of teachers working in the Danish School System are teachers with an education from a University College that last four years and have a practical period in schools for four and a half months.

In the Danish school system we have pedagogues working together with the teachers in their teams and at the afterschool. The pedagogues have their education from a University College that last three and a half years with four practical periods. The staff of pedagogues are mainly in the primary section. At grade 0 are the pedagogues responsible for the daily work and education.

At 1.-3. grade it is possible for the pedagogues the take care of some teaching in subjects and themes within their skills and qualifications. A pedagogue cannot teach a class in a subject through a whole school year on

10. grade	Extra School year
9. grade	Secondary
8. grade	Secondary
7. grade	Secondary
6. grade	Lower Secondary
5. grade	Lower Secondary
4. grade	Lower Secondary
3. grade	Primary
2. grade	Primary
1. grade	Primary
0. grade	Primary



his own. It will still be the teachers responsibility to secure the general teaching that relates to the different aims for subjects at the school.

The interdisciplinary interaction between a pedagogues and teachers is important to secure and support learning in the classroom. The interaction is also important regarding the students wellbeing.

In addition to the traditional “Folkeskole” Denmark has a number of schools that are specialized in different areas. In Albertslund Brøndagerskolen is such a specialized school for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Brøndagerskolen is a full time offer with education and leisure as an intergrated school. The overall guidelines for the “Folkeskole” are the same for the school for children with special needs.

Reform

In 2014 a new reform for the Danish School system at the Elementary School level was implemented. Focus was on several overall areas but tree aims are important:

- 1) The public school must challenge all students to reach their full potential.
- 2) The public school must lower the significance of social background on academic results.
- 3) In the public school the student’s wellbeing must be enhanced through respect for professional knowledge and practice.

Some of the new elements:

- Depth study, contemplation and homework help
- Few and clear objectivities and simplification of rules and regulations
- The municipalities must secure cooperation between the public school and the local culture, – sports and different unions
- The Public school and the local music school must have a mutual cooperation
- An enhanced professional development of teachers, pedagogical staff and school principals
- A longer and varied school day with
- More movement and sports activities to improve teaching and learning.

Below are listed in headlines some of the other new activities.

- Better teaching
- Strengthening foreign languages
- A better teaching environment and quiet in the classroom
- Parental cooperation and student involvement
- Supportive teaching
- More lessons in Danish and Maths
- New subjects: wood and metal work and design plus food knowledge
- Improved final years of compulsory schooling and transition to post compulsory education
- Competence development for teachers, pedagogues and principals

A special view on the Danish School System

In 2014 along with the new reform the curriculum was changed to few and clear objectivities and simplification of rules and regulations. The simplified national curriculum establishes aims for, what the students must learn in all subjects, themes and a special description for the daily work for grade 0. This curriculum is binding and must be followed by every teacher in their plans and teaching in the classroom. The education in the different subjects and themes are also to promote the versatile development of every student. To every subject there are aims and competency for skills and knowledge. To every subject the teacher should find ways to work with IT, media, language, development, innovation and entrepreneurship.

General information about the Danish school system

The Danish teacher can find goals written in the Curriculum edited by the Ministry of Education but at the same time the teachers have freedom of method. That gives the teachers the freedom to plan with the pupils as starting point. To reach the goals the teachers have in general a year period. All teachers are working in teams: teams for one class, teams for all classes on one level of fx three levels and teams working with subjects. The work in the team is a work regarding plans, how to support each other on teacher as well as on pupils and the work regarding the didactics. Pedagogues are a part of the team. The teachers focus on an action oriented way, using fx action learning and classroom management. The public school in Albertslund use a tool called "The book for a child". This book is a book that the child brings from the Kindergarten into the school. Every year the teachers have to use a tool called "Pupils plan". That plan describes the pupils daily work at the school, the wellbeing of the pupil and how the pupil progress in the subject's. Every school year there are held a different talks between teachers and pupils and teachers and parents. The talks are prepared by teachers as well as pupils and parents and deals with learning as well as well-being aspects. On a daily basis the communication is on the local school homepages' intra. Every second year the pupils in the Danish school system are asked how they are doing regarding wellbeing. This questionnaire survey is electronic and every pupil participate on a national level.

Inclusion is a national focus. It is about giving every pupil the possibility to be a part of a social and professional community – essential for learning and development. The responsibility lies in every municipality. In Albertslund we have developed and implemented several culture arrangements to every class and to select. Every year there is a Children's Event – lasting three days, culture-staircase, theater plays, movies, workshops, sports- and science activities, concerts and events on museums and music – and arts school.

A local focus

In Albertslund we had a Common Strategy for the local School System 2012-2017 called "School for all" This strategy is being revised at the moment but the fundamental view on children and the way we look at learning will be maintained. We will still work with how we can give our pupils and students the best school experience and we focus on how we teach and how we will make sure that that they leave our school system with skills to improve further education. The strategy will be supplemented and strengthened with new relevant activities and themes. As a new focus we will look at "Dannelse" (formation (Bildung)/ethical formation/cultivation) a concept to give pupils an understanding of responsibility, rights and duties as well as working with Danish culture, equality and other cultures.

Skole for alle fra 2017-2022



Translation: Subjects for all regarding mathematics and science, language and reading, wellbeing.

Transverse subjects regarding “Dannelse” formation (Bildung)/ethical formation/cultivation, new relevant skills and a varied school day. Also – we in Albertslund we have a strong focus on networking every level. Cooperation in team of Consist of planning, didactics exchange of experience ect.

Focus on the transition from kindergarten to the school

The 0. grade also called the kindergarten class is a year for the child to prepare to be a pupil in the “real school”. The activities are to give the child an understanding of the school as a safe and stable place for learning different subjects, social skills and how to develop. This first year is a transition year and it builds a bridge between activities from the kindergarten to the school – to make sure that the child is prepared for the work in the school and therefore has built up resilience. The contents is divided into six areas (language, mathematic awareness, Natural phenomena, creative and music expressions, body and movement and commitment and community) of skills and three compulsory themes (traffic, education and job, health and sex education as well as family knowledge).

Children in kindergarten class attend 1220 hours every year – that gives 30 hours per week. 600 hours are to be spent on education within the six areas.

Last update: 16.07.2015

In Denmark we have 10 years of compulsory education but no school attendance. Parents have the right to choose how they want their child to be educated. The majority chooses the “Folkesko-le”. The compulsory education starts in August in the year, when the child have the sixth birthday.

Albertslund is a municipality in the area of Copenhagen with 27.698 inhabitants. The municipality is situated 15 kilometer west of Copenhagen and consist of four old villages and a new town center from the 1960-70. In 2015 a new vision for Albertslund was presented to point out especially three areas that Albertslund want to focus on - 1. The town in the nature, 2. The good life for children and 3. A town developing.

Brøndagerskolen

Brøndagerskolen is a special school that provides education and treatment under the law of “Folkeskolelovens § for Special Education” from preschool to the 10th grade. The students come from 17 different municipalities in the region. There are currently 90 – 95 students in 17 teams. The target group is children with Autism Spectrum Disorder as the main diagnose. The school is a “full time offer” from 8.30 – 16.20 with education, leisure as an integrated whole. There is a mix throughout the day of teaching, activities, training in social skills, working with motor skills, practical skills etc. Everything takes place in a learning environment, that support each student’s ability, learning- style, interest and motivation. Preparation for activities and education is planned by teachers and pedagogues in fixed time, scheduled during the week. Brøndagerskolen has a staff of 35 teachers, 35 pedagogues, 25 assistants plus administration. Principal - Mette Deibjerg Rasmussen, Mette.Deibjerg.rasmussen@albertslund.dk Vice principal Tine Zeuner, Tine.Zeuner@albertslund.dk - also head of the Primary school. The school takes part in several collaborations outside Albertslund in Denmark as well abroad.

Herstedvester skole

Herstedvester school is a public school with three departments – primary, lower secondary and secondary – with about 1000 pupils.

Primary – kindergarten class – 3. grade

Lower secondary – 4. – 6.th grade

Secondary – 7. – 9.th grade

The school focus on dialog and to give the pupils as many skills as possible. The learning aspect is essential as well as well-being. The school works with the awareness on language, the tone the children use among themselves, a good atmosphere, cooperation and engagement. There is a close cooperation between teachers and pedagogues and with the institutions connected to the school. For a period of time the school has had a focus on a safe and comfortable transition from kindergarten to the school.

In the kindergarten class once a week they have outdoor teaching with focus on science and nature. In the primary department the school offers motor coordination to pupils after screening. Every school year starts with days of well-being, where roles of fellowship as well as house roles are made clear to give a good environment and interest in participation among the pupils.

The teachers work in team on a daily basis, but also team with special tasks are established. Teams to look at the development in the different subjects as well as cooperation among the colleagues and principals when it comes to well-being and development.

Principal – Nieller Mandrup, Nieller.mandrup@albertslund.dk

Vice principal – Kirsten Ingemann, Kirsten.ingemann@albertslund.dk - also head of the primary school.

Herstedlund skole

Herstedlund skole is going to be an associated part of RECEPTION. The school is situated in the middle of Albertslund and have three departments as well as the other schools in the municipality. Number of students is 611 – November 2016. The reason why this school also wants to participate is because they work on a special project regarding transition from kindergarten to the 0. Grade/ kindergarten class. For a period of about 6 months – three months on both sides of the summer holiday the pupils are participating in a process plan for late class formation before they are placed in their actual class. The children are being tested in Danish and Maths. They work on different subject and during this work the children participate in interviews as well as the parents. On a basis of communication, tests, traditional class work and using My Book, the children are then placed in their class. The talks and activities presented to the children are to make sure, that their



talents are visible as well as the problems they might have. The staff participating in this process are teachers, pedagogues and other relevant members of staff. The project is an ongoing project and can be a supplement to the two different ways already known in Albertslund. Principal as well as head of the primary school—Søren Hald, soren.hald@albertslund.dk

The department of school in Albertslund is represented by Kirsten Schneider

Kirsten.schneider@albertslund.dk. Kirsten Schneider works as a consultant on several areas regarding didactics, culture and participate in cooperation with different local culture institutions to support teaching in the different schools.

GREECE - State of The Art

1. National education context

1.1 Education in Greece

Basic characteristics of Modern Greek Educational System

In Greece, education is a responsibility of the State, protected by Constitution, and is provided for free in every educational level, ranging from kindergarten to university. There is a relatively small number of private schools in existence, but only state universities and institutions provide students with third-degree education and diplomas. The Greek educational system is very centralized regarding its organization and administration, as well as the educational content. There's a national detailed curriculum, unified class schedules and approved textbooks which are compulsory for both public and private schools.

Hellenic Educational System Structure

The Hellenic educational system is divided into three different levels:

- a) Primary Education, which includes Kindergarten and Elementary School
- b) Secondary Education, which includes Middle School (Junior High Schools) and High Schools (General and Technical-Vocational) and
- c) Higher Education, which includes Universities and Technical Educational Institutions.

The Structure of the Educational System, according to its division into mandatory and post-mandatory as dictated by the European Union, is as follows:

Compulsory Education

Education in Greece is compulsory for all children aged 6-15, meaning it includes Kindergarten, Primary Education (Elementary School) and Lower Secondary Education (Middle School). Student school life, however, may begin at the age of 2,5 years (pre-school education) in institutions (private and public) called Nursery Schools. Some Nursery Schools also include Kindergarten Schools.

School attendance duration in Primary Level Education (Elementary School) is six years, with the admittance age being 6 years. Kindergarten and Elementary schools are All-Day schools, and they follow an extended schedule and an enriched Curriculum.

1.2 Actions-measures of balancing education in the school environment

Reception Classes I & II

They concern an idea of balancing deficiencies in the use of the Greek language, and their goal is the smooth integration of the students with their classroom environment and to respond to the linguistic demands of the Greek Schools.

There exist two types of reception classes: **Reception Class I** where the student are given intensive lessons on the Greek language for a year and **Reception Class II** where the student are given supportive lessons on Greek language learning in their classroom for two years, along with attending their regular class's lessons.

Integration classes

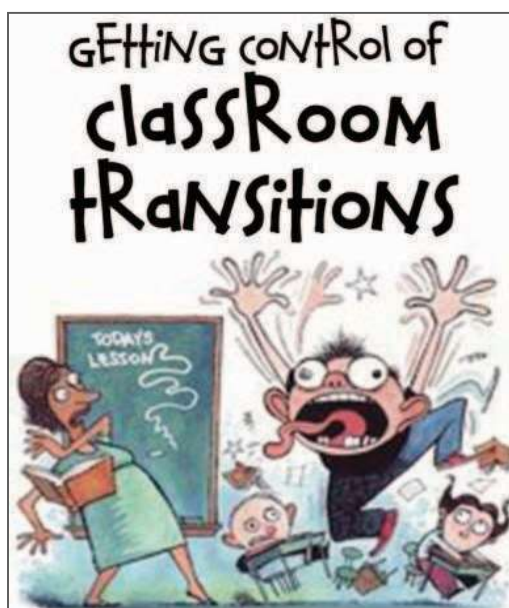
The Integration Class is a Special Education structure inside general schools, with its purpose being educational intervention with individualized programs towards students with special educational needs. It operates inside the general school as a separate class and accepts students from all grades.



In the integration class, each student's educational needs are individually evaluated and their personal curriculum decided according to the deficiencies observed during the evaluation procedure conducted by the special teacher.

Parent Schools are operating under the support of Institute of Lifelong Adult Education (IDEKE) which is supervised by the General Lifelong Education Secretariat of the Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs.

2. The Transition from Kindergarten to Elementary School



The transition from kindergarten to elementary school is one of the major steps that each child has to take in the education continuum and so it is considered as one of the most critical periods of childhood. As children experience demanding changes during this procedure, the transition seems to be very important for the child's future physical, emotional and intellectual development. The maladjustment of children to these significant changes during the transition may have long-term effects in their academic development, their socialization and in the configuration of their personality (Bagakis et al., 2006).

Research and theory on transition emphasize the importance of linkages, close coordination, and continuity between early childhood programs and elementary schools.

More specifically, the smooth transition of young children to elementary school can be achieved when the direct stakeholders take into account the following:

- providing continuity in learning through the design of appropriate programs of cooperation and joint work hours for kindergarten children and first-graders,
- ensuring continuous communication and cooperation among teachers of the two levels,
- preparing children for the transition through various activities, visits and opportunities for communication,
- parental involvement in the transition process, creating an active community in school life of kindergarten and elementary school,
- developing and cultivating positive, mutual communication relations among children, teachers and parents (Koptsis & Nakou, 2009).

The Role of Early Childhood Education in a systematic and comprehensive preparation of infants for the transition to Elementary school in the Greek context

The role of the kindergarten as a bridge to elementary school is very important. Education here should aim at a smooth and effortless transformation of the preschooler to a schoolchild. No statistics are available on the number of children who cannot make this transition smoothly in Greece, whereas no volume of the legislation of our educational system includes any mention to cases of delayed entry into compulsory education, repetition of the first class, or entry of pupils into special schools.

Only public-kindergarten curricula include a short mention to this issue, by suggesting that children would benefit from visiting the facilities of their future elementary school and by getting acquainted with its environment before actually becoming students there (Doliopoulou, 2006).

To a large degree, the smoothness of this transition depends on the sensibility, the attitude, and the educational background of the educators.

In the past, the cooperation between preschool and elementary school institutions was not a frequent phenomenon, especially in those cases when they were not housed in the same building; but even when they were, it didn't seem to make any difference (Zaharenákis, 1996).

Thanks to the Cross-Thematic Curriculum Framework (2003), a positive step is taken in this direction; knowledge is unified and the transition to elementary school is facilitated. Moreover, all university departments of preschool education include in their syllabi courses on this transition and its importance for the children, so that future kindergarten teachers are equipped with the methodological tools to facilitate it (Doliopoulou, 2006).

As learning is a continuous process, the transition from kindergarten to elementary school is important for all those involved in the care and education of infants. Continuity and stability in the proposed educational purposes and the agreement among kindergarten/elementary institutions and parents in basic education positions were considered to prevent breaches of the transition from kindergarten to elementary school. Consequently kindergarten -and particularly the all-day kindergarten plays a mediating role in the adaptation of the child and aims to assist toddlers to adopt a positive attitude towards the school world. Toddlers are ready for successful learning experiences in elementary school as far as there is a positive interaction between the developmental characteristics of the child, the school practices and the family support.

Abroad, many school systems and teachers use various theoretical models for the transition process. Each of these models has different applications in the transition practices of schools and teachers. Two are the most widely used transition models:

- the skills model
- the development-ecological model

The *skills model* focusing on abilities and skills available to the child, limits the period of transition in a given time, for example at the end of the school year.

Unlike the *development-ecological model* describes a set of factors related to the child, family, school and community, which are interconnected and interdependent in the period of transition. This model therefore takes into account the stability of links between school, family and community as the child moves from kindergarten to elementary school. Transition, according to this model, means all those strategies and procedures for

- a) ensuring the smooth entry and adjustment of toddlers in elementary school,
- b) providing continuity through activities that bridge the gap between kindergarten and elementary school, and
- c) the connection of child development with social services, parental support services and preschool education system.

It is about an organized system of relationships and interactions between people (families, teachers and children), space (home, school) and institutions (community, government), running through time and is the so-called eco-transition system (Pianta & Walsh, 1996). This ecological development transition model should guide our thinking in the selection and implementation of effective transition practices.

The role of kindergarten teachers in the transition process is important not only because it helps toddlers but also because it brings beneficial benefits to parents and to the kindergarten teachers themselves.



Beneficial benefits for the children

- The continuity with their previous educational experiences
- Strengthening children's self-confidence
- The openness to new experiences
- Strengthening relationships with other children or teachers
- The development of trust among children and teachers

Beneficial benefits for the parents

- Increasing confidence in the child's ability to succeed in the area of elementary school.
- Strengthening confidence in their ability to communicate with the educational staff and to influence positively the education system
- Pride for their continued involvement in their children's education
- Greater recognition and appreciation for the Kindergarten program.

Beneficial benefits for the kindergarten teachers

Teachers are encouraged to:

- revise their beliefs about learning and development,
- revise school readiness programs, in the light of perceptions, understandings and expectations of the children.
- develop transition programs in cooperation with others and reflect on various issues.
- respect every child's concepts and skills.
- Avoid labels "ready," "not ready" and focus on the learning potential of the child.

Effective planning for children with disabilities

Especially for children with special needs, the transition to elementary school is more complex and requires careful planning and coordination. A transition plan in elementary school should provide an appropriate (sufficient) time for children and parents to learn and practice skills and routines that will facilitate a smooth transition from kindergarten to elementary school.

Thus, the goal of transition planning is to help children adapt quickly to the school premises and to develop a positive attitude towards education. A good start in school enhances children's opportunities for future success.

Central direction programs for a smooth, positive transition

During the 2007-2008 school years, the Ministry of Education, in order to upgrade the quality of kindergartens, attempted the application of innovative interventions, which aimed at strengthening the role of the All-day Kindergarten, connecting it with other levels of education. The ultimate aim was the systematic and comprehensive preparation of toddlers for the transition to Elementary school.

The innovative interventions were focused on the following indicative actions and activities

1. Acquaintance and familiarization visits of kindergarten children with places, persons, educational methods and activities of the A Class of Elementary School.
2. Development of thematic work plans (projects) to the kindergartens or in collaboration with the 1st Grade of Elementary schools, in order to achieve the objectives of the smooth transition of toddlers from kindergarten to elementary school.
3. Awareness and inform of the parents and the local community institutions, in relation to the educational process of transition, by regular open meetings in order to prepare the parents for their new role as parents of pupils of primary school.

4. Organizing exhibitions, theatrical and other events by the toddlers or in cooperation with first-graders.
5. Actions for the early detection of learning or other difficulties that may be faced by the toddlers and support measures in cooperation with the kindergartens, the DASC (Diagnosis, Assessment and Support Centers) the Preschool or/and School Education Counselors, parents and others institutions related to the Ministry of Education.

The participation in this program, implemented by the Ministry of Education, was voluntary.

486 kindergartens throughout the Greek territory participated.

The evaluation of the program showed the benefits derived from that participation by all stakeholders, students, teachers and parents. The studies and evaluation reports also highlighted as positive aspects of the program: the improvement of the educational and pedagogical effectiveness of all-day kindergarten, the enhance of children's socialization, the children's response to the program's activities and the positive attitude towards the school world. Finally, the vast majority of respondents expressed a desire for the continuation of the program and its extension to the classic nursery (Koptsis & Nakou, 2009).

An educational, supportive material has been created for the teachers, the toddlers and their parents, in order to assist and enrich the kindergarten curriculum. Part of this material is the "Parent Guide", which is an innovative effort that sets a new basis of dialogue and cooperation among teachers and parents. This initiative by the state recognizes on the one hand the important role of parents in their children's school success, while on the other the need to be informed about the nature, the structure, the operation of the kindergarten and for various issues they may face during the school career of their children.

Although the aforementioned program of the Ministry of Education was positively evaluated in all aspects, it has not been officially incorporated in the kindergarten curricula.

Actually, the most Preschool Education Counselors promote the implementation of this program, focusing on its good practices and a significant number of kindergarten teachers have included similar actions and activities in the daily schedule of the kindergarten, aiming at a smooth and effective transition to elementary school.

Annual training programs regarding the transition from Kindergarten to Elementary school in Western Thessaloniki

There are various educational programs for the transition from Kindergarten to Elementary school which apply to many of the 240 Kindergartens and the 183 Elementary schools in Western Thessaloniki. Most of these programs are based in contemporary pedagogical approaches such as Intercultural Education and Cooperative Learning. Their general aim is to develop bonds of friendship, cooperation and understanding among the children of Kindergarten and Elementary school. The participation of the parents and their cooperation with the educators from both stages (kindergarten and elementary school) is a challenging aspect of these programs.



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Iceland – Reykjavík – State of the Art Report

Iceland is an island in the North Atlantic Ocean and just touches the Arctic Circle. It is one of the most volcanic regions in the world and over 10% of the island is covered with snowfields and glaciers. The Gulf-stream keeps Icelandic climate milder than one would expect for an island near the Arctic Circle.

The population of the whole country on January 1st 2018 was 348.450.

The Icelandic language is descended from Old Norwegian and is closely related to Faroese and West Norwegian dialects.

Like most European countries Iceland has an increasing number of immigrants. Most of the immigrants come from Poland. The increasing immigration has led to linguistic challenge in schools and the society as a whole and a general challenge in integration and assimilation.

Iceland is a representative democracy and a parliamentary republic. The president is a ceremonial head of state and serves as a diplomat. The head of government is the prime minister who together with the cabinet is responsible for the executive government.

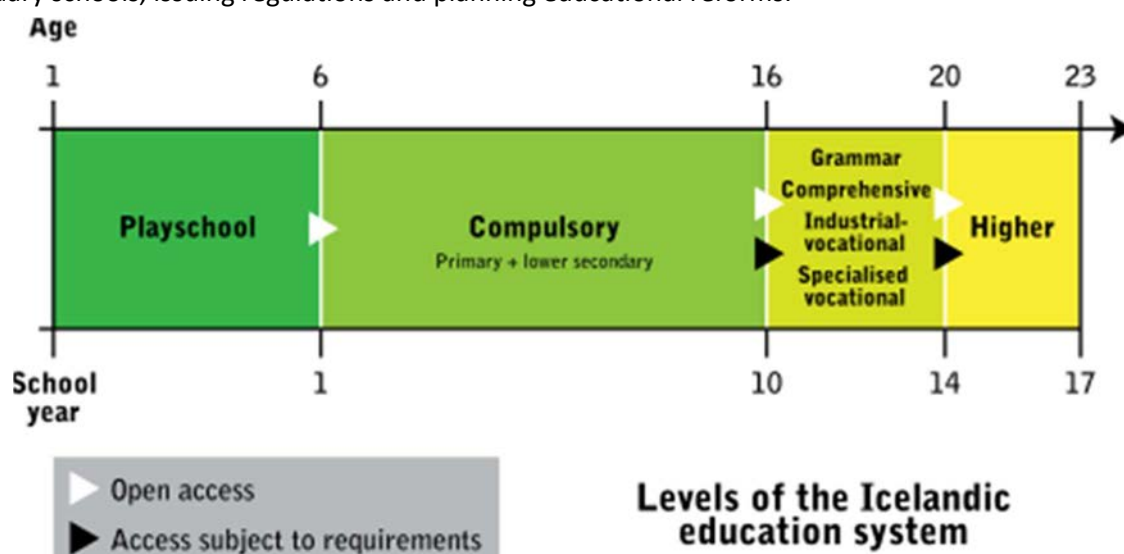
There are 74 municipalities in Iceland and they govern local matters like pre-and compulsory schools, transport and social service.

Reykjavík is the capital city and it is the largest city in Iceland with approximately 122.000 inhabitants. Reykjavík and the surroundings area in the southwest of the country is the home to over two-thirds of the population.

Education in Iceland

Iceland has a high level of education. Literacy-rate is universal and has been since the end of the eighteenth century. Iceland's educational system has four levels, of which only one is compulsory. A fundamental principle of the Icelandic educational system is that each and every individual has equal opportunities to acquire an education, irrespective of sex, economic status, residential location, religion, possible disability and cultural or social background.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture is responsible for the implementation of legislation pertaining to all school levels from pre-primary and compulsory education through the upper secondary and higher educational levels. This includes the tasks of creating curriculum, for pre-primary, compulsory and upper secondary schools, issuing regulations and planning educational reforms.



Pre-School education is defined by law as the first level of the educational system, providing education and care for children who have not reached six years of age, at which point compulsory education begins.

Compulsory education is organised in a single structure system, i.e. primary and lower secondary education form part of the same school level. Legislation on compulsory education stipulates that education shall be mandatory.

Upper secondary education is not compulsory, but anyone who has completed compulsory education has the right to enter an upper secondary school.

Higher educational system. Anyone who has completed upper secondary education in Iceland can apply to study at university.

Education in Reykjavík. In the last years the educational system in Iceland has been decentralised both with regard to responsibilities, finance and decision-making. In 1996 a new legislation concerning compulsory schools took effect and the municipalities took over the operation of schools at the compulsory level.

Reykjavik City Division of Education and Youth (October 2015)

- 62 pre-schools with 6.000 children from 18 months to 5 years of age and 18 independent pre-schools with 1.100 children. Around 900 children from 6-18 months of age stay with 200 home-daycare individuals.
- 36 elementary schools with 13.400 students from 6-9 years of age and 6 independent elementary schools with 580 students.
- 5 schools where pre-school, elementary school and/or after-school programs are combined.
- 39 after-school programs for 6-9 years of age for around 3.400 children.
- 25 youth clubs for 10-16 years of age with 180.000 attendances yearly, of which 5 are specific youth clubs for children with disabilities.
- school bands where 440 students learn to play an instrument.
- Adult Education Center where around 250 individuals over 16 years of age receive education and 1.500 seek guidance counselling every year.
- Reykjavik city supports 2.500 students in 18 music schools.
- Reykjavik has about 1.740 full-time preschool and compulsory school teacher's positions.

Reykjavik serves a diverse community

- Our children speak 70+ languages and come from over 97 different nationalities.
- About 1.400 elementary students learn Icelandic as a second language.
- About 8% of pre-school children and 25% of elementary students receive special education or support some time during their school attendance in elementary school. Around 7% of children in after-school program receive special support. In addition, there are five leisure clubs for children with disabilities.

Reykjavik's Mission

To ensure the well-being of every student, consistent advance and a good education and upbringing for lifetime achievement.

Children and Youth in Reykjavik achieve success

- Students in the final year of the compulsory school are over national average in Icelandic, mathematics and English in annual standardized tests in 2015.
- PISA 2009 results for reading, mathematics and science were improved following a city-wide effort targeting those subjects.
- 90% of parents of pre-school children feel that the pre-school works well with social skills and 97% say that their children are happy at the pre-school.



- Around 75% of parents say that after-school programs and youth centers have positive influence on their children's social competence and the activities are interesting.
- Over 90% of youth aged 13-15 take part in some form of leisure activities.
- The city has shown good results in our schools where monitoring methods and prevention policy has significantly decreased students' use of alcohol, drugs and smoking.
- Around 80% of students 12-15 years of age say they always do their best to learn the skills and knowledge presented in their studies.
- Over 90% of elementary school parents think their children are happy at school.

The City of Reykjavik has issued a policy for children who have Icelandic as a second language. Emphasis is laid on well organized integration, multicultural teaching methods and the great value of cultural diversity.

Special Education and Special Schools.

Pupils are entitled to have their needs for education met in a regular, inclusive, compulsory school, regardless of their physical or mental abilities. Where a child, in the opinion of its parents, headteachers, teachers or other specialists, will not be able to receive suitable instruction at a regular compulsory school, the parents may request that the child be admitted either to a special class in a compulsory school or to a specialised school. All elementary schools can offer students support in case of specific learning difficulties, emotional or social difficulties or disabilities. However there are two schools in Reykjavik which are designed only for students with special needs. Elementary schools receive financial allocation for special education and support for children.

Special classes in regular schools

Six special classes for children with autism are in the city's elementary schools for students aged 6 - 16 years. 7 – 15 students are in each class. Langholtsskóli has a special class for 9 pupils with autism.

Transition from Preschool to Primary School

Children start compulsory school the year they turn six years old. Although preschools are not compulsory, both preschools and primary schools in Iceland are defined as educational institutions. Both school levels and are under the supervision of the municipality but the Ministry of Education publishes National curricula for both school levels. Almost all children at the age of five attend a preschool in Reykjavik.

Langholtsskóli

Respect - wellbeing - creativity



There are now 670 pupils in the school which was established in the year 1952 and the pupils are from 1st - 10th grade. There is also a department for 9 pupils with autism.

We have built up a cooperation between Langholtsskóli and the four preschools (Sunnúás, Langholt, Brákaborg and Vinagarður) in the neighbourhood. The aim of the plan is to make the transition to primary school successful.

Our plan

- In September the teachers of the first year of Langholtsskóli and the teachers of five year old preschool children have a meeting and set a plan for the school year.



- The five year old children come to Langholtsskóli on the 16th of November (Icelandic language day) and have an assembly with the first year students.
- On 19th of December they are invited to watch the Christmas school play.
- In January pupils in 7th grade go to their old preschool and read a story for the children.
- In February the children in the first form go to their old preschools to play together with the pupils. They play for an hour and invite the five year old children to come to their school to study.
- The children come in small groups to Langholtsskóli and work with the first class for two lessons and play with them in the break.
- At the end of April the children who will attend Langholtsskóli in the autumn come together with their parents for a school visit. The teachers have a program for the children and at the same time the parents get an introduction by the headmaster.
- In May there are a lot of meetings for example the Head of the special needs children have meetings with parents and teachers from the preschools and the Head of the department for the 1st stage visits preschools and has a meeting with the preschool teachers who give a report on the children that are coming to the school in the autumn.
- In May the five year old children and the 1st grade pupils go together to a park near the school and work on a project together and sing a few songs.
- At the end of May the preschool pupils visit Langholtsskóli again to play some games in the schoolyard with the 1st grade pupils.
- When the school starts in August the children come individually to visit with their parents and have a meeting with their new teacher.

The cooperation between Langholtsskóli and the preschools develops every year.

Some videos from the school:

Thinking of peace dec 2015 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1eVwrQFlf4s>

Friends 2016 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=20Mw6Re8eGg>

Love 2017 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ApiWBFJwtaw>

1st class https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zT_niHLyr54

1st class https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4-Hbji_dDZ4

IRELAND CASE STUDY

The Case Study Report – Ireland: Aistear –Play in Practice

Context

Education in Ireland is compulsory from age 6 to 16 or until students have completed three years of second level (post-primary) education. Since 2015, the Irish government has provided funding for two years of preschool education for children aged three to five years. First level schools (primary schools) may accept children on or after their fourth birthday. The majority of primary schools are state funded but are privately owned, the majority by the Catholic Church. The typical primary school enrolls pupils by age into eight year-groups or classes, ranging from junior infants to sixth class. The curriculum followed is a child-centred one and prescribed by the Department of Education although it allows for flexibility in timetabling and teaching methods.

Current Developments in Early Childhood Education in Ireland

The transition from preschool to primary school is recognised nationally and internationally as a very important time in children's lives. This transition is a priority area of work in the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment's Strategic Plan, 2015-2018.

As part of Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020, the NCCA was assigned responsibility for carrying out a review of national and international transition policies and best practice and for developing reporting templates.

The main findings of the review confirm that **a positive experience during this important transition is a predictor of children's future success in terms of social, emotional and educational outcomes and the probability of early school leaving.** Furthermore, the review notes that in addition to the transfer of relevant information, the roles of all stakeholders in the process must be considered in order to support children making the transition from preschool to primary school. From the child through to parents and family, preschool practitioners and primary school teachers, the emphasis currently is on supporting the stakeholders to communicate and collaborate.

Aims, methods and implementation

Two primary schools, in collaboration with Clare Education Centre, participated in this project.

Scoil na Maighdine Mhuire, Newmarket on Fergus, Co. Clare

Scoil na Maighdine Mhuire was founded in 1959. It is a vertical co-educational Catholic school catering for children from Junior Infants to Sixth Class. There is a special class for pupils with a diagnosis of Autistic Spectrum Disorders. At present there are 214 pupils, 13 full time teachers, 1 part time teacher and 5 Special Needs Assistants in the school. There is also a pre-school on campus which is funded by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. It is an 'Incredible Years' school, where all staff try to catch children being good and promote positive behaviour management.

The school is set in the village of Newmarket on Fergus which is approximately 8 kilometres from Shannon Airport. A sizable percentage of the parents of the children in the school are employed in Shannon. Although the school does not have 'DEIS' status a significant percentage of families (46.5%) are in receipt of Social Welfare allowances e.g. Lone Parent allowance, Family Income supplement etc.



Holy Family Junior School, Ennis, Co. Clare

Holy Family School began life as the Convent of Mercy in 1854. The present school was built in 1965. Holy Family Junior School caters for both boys and girls from Junior Infants to first Class. The campus is shared with the Holy Family Senior School which is where the pupils move on to second class. There is a long established Montessori School on the campus and a recently developed Afterschool Facility.

It is designated as a DEIS band 2 school, which means that the school is recognised as having children who are disadvantaged based on social class background, parental education, household income and family structures. The Department of Education provides extra support for literacy, numeracy and parental involvement in DEIS schools.

There are 19 teachers, 9 Special Needs Assistants for pupils with special needs and 3 ancillary staff. It is also an 'Incredible Years' school, where all staff try to catch children being good and promote positive behaviour management.

There are three special classes in Holy Family Junior School, a Class for the Deaf, a Class for Pupils with Autism and a Speech and Language Class.



The main goal of this case study was to facilitate a smooth transition from ECCE (Early Childhood Care and Education) to Junior Infants in both primary schools for each child and to improve arrangements for the transfer of information about the progress and achievements of pupils between the schools and the preschools on their campuses.

The following actions were identified:

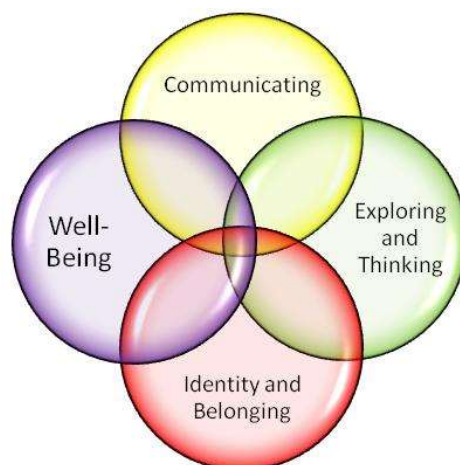
1. Meetings between preschool and junior infant teachers *
2. Implementation of the Aistear Programme in the preschool and the junior infant classes *
3. Transition journal created, picture of teacher, principal etc. *
4. Visits to the class room, playroom, school yard and principal's office *
5. Pupil interviews
6. Adoption of 'Incredible Years' in our preschools *
7. Preschool pupils to attend events in both primary schools e.g. Halloween dress up and parade, Easter bonnet parade, Christmas concerts and carol services and assemblies at the end of the year. *
8. Parents' open nights and induction days.

*Only with pupils from the ECCE settings on our school campuses. This enabled us to evaluate the efficacy of the transition programme by comparing with pupils who came from other settings.

We found that during the first year, the main focus for this case study became the implementation and the evaluation of the Aistear Programme in the junior infant classes and the preschools on our campuses.

Aistear is the **curriculum framework** for children from **birth to six years** in Ireland. It provides information for adults to help them plan for and provide enjoyable and challenging learning experiences, so that all children

can grow and develop as **competent and confident learners** within loving relationships with others. As a curriculum framework, with four main themes, Communicating, Wellbeing, Exploring and Thinking and Identity and Belonging, Aistear works as a guide for teachers in planning practical learning programmes for children in infant classes and preschools. Aistear, together with the infant curriculum, is used to plan fun and challenging experiences for the children in our classrooms.



Aistear is timetabled and structured and planning by teachers is collaborative and themed. Play is extremely important in the development of young children. It is meaningful, enjoyable and sociable. It also encourages the children to be adventurous and experimental in a safe environment. Problem solving skills are constantly being reinforced. Children are also encouraged to build relationships with one another and with the teacher.

Good quality play experiences impact positively on children's learning and development. Through Aistear in the preschool and infant class classrooms, children are learning to experience risk within safe and secure boundaries. Most of all they are having fun while learning.

For this case study, Aistear was implemented in the preschools and the infant classes of both schools.

Implementation

- Weekly Aistear planning meetings
- Monthly planning and reflection meetings
- Meetings with preschool teachers
- Parental questionnaires
- Teacher assesment of Aistear using checklists, teacher observation and self assessment
- Language Curriculum Progression Continuum Milestones for Oral Language
- Gathering of resources for enriched learning
- Completion of play diary for targetted pupils
- Organisation of school visits – assemblies, playroom, teddy bears' picnics etc
- Familiarisation visits to the junior infant classes
- Joint participation of preschool and junior infant pupils for Aistear
- Ongoing and relevant professional development for preschool and infant teachers
- Visits to other early years' settings to see Aistear in operation
- Agreed format for handover of information from one teacher to the next



Findings

Based on the comparison of pupils who had experienced Aistear and Incredible Years in the schools' preschools and of pupils who had come from other ECCE settings, we found:

- Pupils who had attended the partner preschools displayed a better ability to play, interact with imagination and creativity and were more aware of social conventions and others. The infant teachers in Scoil na Maighdine Muire noticed a marked difference in the acquisition and use of vocabulary.
- In Holy Family Junior School, where there is a significant EAL population, during the implementation of Aistear, language was identified early on as a serious cause for concern and based on the recently revised Language Curriculum, a pilot programme of Oral Language Station Teaching was developed in the infant classes. Pre and post testing results indicated improvements in all areas of the Language Curriculum and the pilot was extended to other classes. Oral Language help sheets were sent home to parents each month, based on the topics taught during Aistear and Oral Language station teaching.
- There were no significant behavioural differences in relation to gender where pupils had experienced the Incredible Years Programme in our preschools. Where pupils had not been exposed to IY, boys presented with more challenging behaviours initially. But by the end of September, having engaged in the IY programme, teachers found no significant differences between the two groups. The Incredible Years' Parents' Programme was offered to identified parents with very positive outcomes. (The Incredible Years Teacher Classroom Management programme focuses on strengthening teacher classroom management strategies and improving teacher-parent relationships. This leads to an increase in children's social, emotional and academic competence and reduces classroom aggression and disruptive behaviour.)
- Regular contact between the preschool teachers on campus and infant teachers ensured that pupils with special needs were identified early on and supports put in place before the start of junior infants. This was not always the case with pupils who came from other ECCE settings.
- In both schools this case study helped to develop and imbed best practice. The shared experience of two schools from different settings working together, in collaboration with Clare Education Centre, was a very positive and empowering experience for the teachers involved. Teachers had opportunities to engage with other teachers and to share ideas.

- Clare Education Centre offered support and ongoing professional development for the teachers. The centre also facilitates an Infant Education Support Group where the ideas developed in this project can be disseminated. There is also a very active Principals' Forum based in the Centre, meeting on a monthly basis. It is the intention of both principals to share our findings with our local principals
- There was more meaningful engagement with preschool teachers, with more focussed discussions and a better understanding of the needs of the pupils.
- We developed more resources for parents to use at home with their children

Conclusions

This project has been a very positive and useful experience for both schools. As a result of this case study, a formal transition programme, using the methodologies identified above, is being drawn up between our preschools and infant classes. We plan to extend this to other feeder preschools, not on our campuses, in 2019.

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NORWAY CASE STUDY

A Safe and Strong Start in School– transition from kindergarten to school at Centres-of-Growing-Up

A Case Study Report from Luster, Norway



The kindergarten and the school at Luster Centre-of-Growing-Up on a joint field trip

1. Overview

Greater social equalisation is an overall goal for the Norwegian educational system and all children must be included in good learning processes as early as possible and be given an education which encourages achievement (mastering) and a good learning outcome. Learning to read and write are basic skills that have a special importance in Early Years Education.

A key question is how we can help the oldest children in kindergarten to get ready for the challenges of grade school and help them feel socially safe and comfortable with the change from the informal and playful kindergarten to the start of formal schooling.

In the municipality of Luster there are a total of nine schools. Five of them are so-called Centres-of-Growing-Up – in Norwegian the term is *oppvekstsenter* – combined kindergarten 0-6 years and primary school grade 1-7. All the five Centres-of-Growing-Up in Luster participates in the RECEPTION project. The Centres are situated in the villages Solvorn, Indre Hafslo, Jostedal, Luster and Skjolden. The case study gives the participants an opportunity to investigate and revise the local procedures for transition and reflect upon how

different initiatives may help the children to accommodate to formal school and strengthen school readiness.

2. Context

The number of pupils attending the five Centres-of-Growing-Up in Luster ranges in 2017/18 from 25 pupils in the smallest to 38 in the largest school. This amount of pupils will normally result in either two or three composite classes and multi-aged classrooms. Centres-of-Growing-Up is quite common in rural areas of Norway.

The kindergarten part of the Centre-of-Growing-Up are either situated in the same building as the school or in a building nearby. The principal at the Centre-of-Growing up are also the leader of the kindergarten, the assistant principal is the leading kindergarten teacher/pedagogue of the kindergarten and together they constitutes the leader team of the Centre-of-Growing-Up.

Although there are no obligatory national program in Norway for the transition to school most municipalities have their own local procedures for the transition from kindergarten to school. In Luster Municipality the previous local procedures were mainly based on a national guide from 2008; *From being the oldest to becoming the youngest. Cooperation and relationship between kindergarten and school*, published by The Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research.

The five Centres-of-Growing-Up in Luster were established in 2012. Thus there was now a need for revising the local procedures addressing the new organizational structure and also considering new initiatives, activities and practises connected to the transition.

In the case study the Centres-of-Growing-Up therefore decided on investigating the existing procedures for transition and take a closer look at the different aspects and initiatives that could improve school readiness and create progress during the Early Years Education.

The key elements we chose to focus on were:

- Well-being^{SEP}
- Play^{SEP}
- Communicating / Language
- Inclusion



Pupil are tutor for kindergarten introducing coding. Structure, daily routines and sign language teaching as means to strengthen inclusion and involvement.

3. Implementation

All five Centres-of-Growing-Up have taken part in the case study and the related initiatives .

The main period for investigating and following up the different initiatives are the school year 2017/18. All but a few initiatives in the case study are common for all of the Centres-of-Growing-Up.

The set of initiatives tried out during the case study period:

- joint learning networks with kindergarten teachers and first grade teachers from all schools and Centres-of-Growing-Up in the municipality
- joint capacity building in kindergarten and school staff through participation in a national in-service training program, *Språkløyper*, about the topic language difficulties
- trying out a practise of accelerated progression of teaching letters
- revision of local procedures for transition between kindergarten and school
- regular collaboration and meetings between the kindergarten teacher and the first grade teacher; planning joint activities and meetings between the oldest children in the kindergarten and the school pupils. Examples of such activities and meetings are for instance:
 - cultural meetings where the kindergarten children and school pupils perform for each other
 - planned joint break times where the oldest kindergarten children and first graders play together
 - joint field trips
 - joint outdoor education / lessons
 - planned pre-school days with school-like activities
 - the school pupils act as «helpmates» for the kindergarten children, for instance reading for them on a regular basis, play together etc.
- joint activities between the oldest children in the kindergarten and the school pupils emphasizing familiar teaching methods in the kindergarten; e.g. role play and other play-based activities.
- longterm planning and tight collaboration between kindergarten and school staff regarding transition to school for children with special needs

As the case study involves five different centres of growing up it will also be important to pick up on differences and similarities and especially focus on possibilities and the potential for improving.

4. Aims and methods

The main aspect of the case study will be how the set of initiatives listed above nurtures the well-being of the children and prepares them for school. Another important aspect will be to target the role of play in the transition process. Hopefully these initiatives create social bonds between the pre-schoolers and the pupils at school and make the transition smooth and more familiar.

A third aspect is emphasizing the importance of language and communication as tools for both strengthening well-being and motivating the children in their learning processes. Interwoven with this aspect is the principle of inclusion. The Norwegian school system is based on the principles of equality and adapted learning for everyone within an inclusive environment. All students should develop key skills, and in the course of their education they should both face challenges and experience a sense of achievement.

To examine the efficiency of the different initiatives in the case study we considered questionnaires as an appropriate tool. The questionnaires were sent out to all teachers and parents in first grade. Besides also all principals at the five schools answered the same questions as the teachers. Additional methods were observation and group reflections at the meetings at the learning network between kindergarten teachers and first grade teachers.

5. Results

The parents

In the questionnaire the parents of the first graders got a set of questions where some were about the transitional process from kindergarten to school and the quality of this while other questions concentrated on some specific initiatives.

Regarding how satisfied the parents were regarding the transition process itself the average score was 4,36 where 5,0 points were "Very satisfied". When answering which of the initiatives the parents thought had contributed the most to a smooth and safe transition almost all of the parents pointed out the value of the kindergarten children visiting the school and joint activities with the pupils and through this getting to know the pupils and the teachers before the kindergarten children started school themselves.

The parents that answered – 65 % response rate – were also quite happy with the introduction of accelerated progression of teaching letters; 4.0 average points where 5.0 were top score. When asked about what could make the transition between kindergarten and school even better viewed through the eyes of a parents the answers were:

- More free play and physical activities when the children begin at school. This will improve their motivation for learning
- That the children get the chance to be children and more is on their premises
- Even more pre-school days and visits from the first grade teacher in kindergarten

The teachers and the principals

The school staff did a more comprehensive and detailed questionnaire than the parents. When asked to reflect upon which initiative that resulted in what they experienced as an improved three tendencies were identified:

- 1) Regular meetings between the kindergarten teacher and the first grade teacher where they can get to know each other and typical pedagogical methods in the respective institutions (more specific: play based learning in kindergarten, ICT in the teaching of reading and writing) and plan joint activities. Several remarks the advantage of these meetings being regular and placed on the calendar.
- 2) Give information earlier to the parents about expectations regarding the last year in kindergarten.
- 3) The value of network between kindergarten teachers and school teachers about the procedures for transition.

When the teachers and principals are asked the same question that the parents; which initiative contributes the most to achieve a smooth transition the school staff is more or less of the same perception as the parents: tight cooperation between the kindergarten and school teacher, a fixed framework with many meeting points for the children and reserved time to collaborate and plan.

An initiative all schools tried out during the school year were accelerated progression in teaching letters. The overall impression is that this approach is having some particular advantages, for instance more time to repetition and more customized training for the individual pupil. The approach is combined with the so-called Writing to Reading-method where the pupils uses ICT to write and to listen to what they have written themselves. That the relevant programs and computers function is a crucial part of getting the most out of the Writing-to-reading-method.

Working with revising the local procedures for transition to kindergarten has been regarded as positive among both the teachers and the principals. The process has accentuated the different conditions there is between the transition process at the Centres-of-Growing-Up in Luster and at the two larger primary schools in the municipality. Another element that was pointed out was the



importance of extra measures and long-term-planning in transitions regarding children with special needs. Additional factors for a successful transition for this group of children were deciding early who the first grade teacher should be, give necessary in-service-training (in one specific example this meant sign language), building safe relations by having the teacher visit kindergarten regularly and letting the kindergarten special needs pedagogue follow over to school and be part of the teacher's team in grade 1 and 2. All these factors makes inclusion more possible and real.



6. Conclusions

An overall impression is that it has been useful and rewarding to have local learning networks between kindergarten and school teachers to let them discuss joint pedagogical challenges relating the transition from kindergarten to school and getting to know more of each institution's usual pedagogical methods. Another lasting impression is the importance of regular meetings between the kindergarten teacher and the first grade teachers (at the Centres-of-Growing-Up) to plan joint activities for the children. This finding is also in accordance with the recommended measure the Norwegian Knowledge Centre for Education stresses in



their research paper "Transition from Kindergarten to School – A Systematic Review"; Professional collaboration between kindergarten teachers and teachers in school, exchange of information about the children and joint collaborative projects.

Other important reflections working with revising the procedures of the transition from kindergarten to school is the vision of having the focus on making schools ready for children, not children ready for school, perceiving the transition as a process – a series of critical events – rather than a single event. Lastly, the shared impression that play based learning must be regarded as a major factor in learning for both kindergarten children and first graders.

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CROATIA CASE STUDY

Monitoring of verbal-lingvistic development of pre-school children in Elementary school Matije Gupca Gornja Stubica

Authors: Ines Krušelj-Vidas, translation: Tatjana Kontent

Location: Gornja Stubica, May 2018.

Trans-European need for primary schools to address the diversity of children's social and educational preparation for their entry to primary school puts in focus efforts for making changes in early years education. This need is also present in the Republic of Croatia and therefore in Gornja Stubica as well.

Context

In the Republic of Croatia the reform of the education system is underway, with the aim of changing the teaching methodology and primarily reducing the amount of teaching contents but so far the education system in the Republic of Croatia still consists of the following: preschool education, elementary education, secondary education, higher education and adult education. Kindergartens have parental fees and are not obligatory, but preschool (one year before the school) is compulsory for all children who do not attend kindergarten. Preschool programmes are free of charge. Eight-year elementary education in the Republic of Croatia is compulsory and free of charge for all children at the age of seven to fifteen. For students with multiple disabilities it lasts longer but not longer than the age of 21. Secondary education institutions are, depending on the type of educational programme, divided into high schools, vocational and artistic secondary schools. Activities of higher education in the Republic of Croatia are implemented by universities, polytechnics and schools for professional higher education with all its constituents.



ES Matije Gupca Gornja Stubica

At the beginning of every school year 1st grade teachers of ES Matije Gupca Gornja Stubica embrace the challenge of working with children with extremely diverse level of readiness for formal education. These differences are based not only on children's individual abilities but mostly on the fact if children did or did not attend kindergarten programme. The children who from the age of 4 attended kindergarten have undergone an intense programme of institutionalized support for the development of child's capacities. Those who did not attend kindergarten went through just one year of an obligatory preschool programme at the age of 6. There are many other factors which influence the readiness of a child to attend school and its future success.

Only 10% of preschool population in Gornja Stubica attend kindergarten programme because there is no kindergarten in Gornja Stubica (the nearest one is in Donja Stubica). Most of the children are being looked after at home by grandparents or parents who are not employed. The majority of children from Gornja Stubica attend organized preschool programme in the ES Matije Gupca which is financed by local municipality.



Preschool programme in ES Matije Gupca Gornja Stubica

One specific feature of ES Matije Gupca Gornja Stubica is that there is the pre-school educational institution within school building. That enables the employees of school (primarily the pedagogue and 1st grade teachers) to get to know some of future 1st graders even before the formal beginning of the 1st grade. It was decided to use this advantage to implement additional activities which would help preschool pupils move more smoothly into the area of formal education. In the school year 2017/2018 there were 37 pupils included in the pre-school programme. Twenty-eight of them attending the preschool programme in the main school building and it was decided to do the case study research with them. Although the sample was relatively small, the results are concrete and are planned to be used in future work of school in several different ways.

Aims, methods and implementation

The main goal of case study was to do a research on efficiency of intensive reading stories aloud on the development of verbal-linguistic skills of preschool students in Elementary School Matije Gupca Gornja Stubica. The activity was intensively conducted by ten teachers included in RECEPTION project and it was an additional activity because pre-school teacher sometimes reads stories aloud to children regardless the project.

The research was designed so that the children who attend pre-school programme in main school building have been divided into two groups; one experimental where the activity of intensive reading stories aloud would be done, and one control group where there would be no such activity. The control group was needed so that the ordinary development of children without additional encouraging activities could be estimated.



Reading aloud activity

Choosing stories for reading aloud activity was a specially challenging task. The stories had to be age appropriate, with an interesting topic for children, “healing stories” – dealing with certain problem. An additional criterion was that the stories were available in English. In such a way other RECEPTION partners could use them as well. Two books written by Susan Perrow have been chosen: *Healing Stories for Challenging Behaviour* and *Therapeutic Storytelling - 101 Healing Stories for Children*. All together twenty-two stories were chosen from these books for reading aloud activity. During 3,5 months, every time the experimental group had classes, children listened to these stories as an additional activity. These stories are intended for children from the age of 3 to the age of 8 and basically they accompany the children in growing up, helping them dealing with new and difficult situations which have, due to their intensity, caused inappropriate behaviour. Some of the topics appropriate for the preschool children are: changes and adaptation, fear from separation, obstruction, housekeeping and tidiness, disobedient children, scuffle, boredom, stubbornness, encouraging sharing and cooperation.

The question behind the activity was: What happens with the children during the activity? Will they have better results after the implementation of activity?

To get the answer to the question stated above some statistical data about children’s results in verbal-linguistic area had to be collected before the project started and after it finished. These data were collected both for experimental and control group by teachers who were doing the reading aloud activity. The measuring was done twice: at the beginning and at the end of the research. Between these two measuring activities, in experimental group the activity of intensive reading stories aloud had been done.

The estimation of the level of children's verbal-linguistic development or quantitative data were gathered using already designed methodology of measuring children’s verbal linguistic skills designed by Dragan Lisica, an experienced speech therapist.

Although the method was originally intended for children who have speech impediments, it can easily be applied to all children. It is based on a picture book without text *A story to tell* designed by Dick Bruna and on a booklet manual *Path to the child’s heart* written by Dragan Lisica where was found all the necessary instructions for conducting the examination. Dragan Lisica states that the advantage of picture book as a means of examination lies in the fact that the examinee can develop its own observations, connect them and interpret them in a way which is similar to spontaneous speech and therefore the examinee's independence in structuring sentences and utterance can be studied. A child was offered a picture book „A story to tell“ by Dick Bruna and was told to tell the story based on the pictures. The following parameters were being measured: **the length of the story, the number of used words and the accuracy of the story description**. In



the booklet manual there are: protocol for recording children's stories, table for assessing child's description of the story and protocol for comparing repeated measuring of verbal linguistic skills using *A story to tell* picture book. There are also instructions how to prepare a child for the activity of telling the story guided by pictures as well as the instructions for the examiners to be as neutral as possible without presumably encouraging and improving a child's vocabulary.



Measuring of verbal-linguistic skills

The length of the story is an important element in the estimation of the story quality and it was measured in minutes. It depends on many abilities that a child has; among the most important ones are: age, oral-linguistic maturity, the quality of attention and thinking, emotional maturity.

However, a story can be accurately told using fewer words. On the other side, a long story can lack precision and clarity. So it is for the best to take into the account the average number of words combined with length and accuracy of the story telling.

The accuracy of the story description was measured by the number of points given according to the table in Dragan Lisica' manual. The table for the estimation of the accuracy of the story description consists of three important criteria:

1. noticing and listing picture elements
2. connecting noticed and listed picture elements
3. enriching of the utterance by using details

Obtained points were then compared with overall ranking and in such a way the level of verbal-linguistic development was determined:

I	II	III	IV	V
very weak	weak	good	very good	excellent

All the results have been analysed using Excel programme and here are the main findings about quantitative data about verbal-linguistic achievements of the preschool pupils.

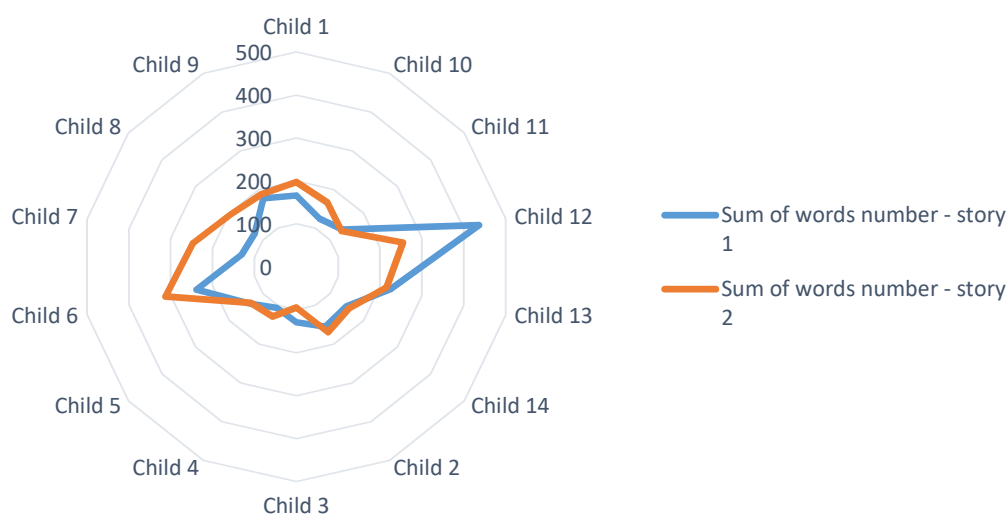
The average time of the first storytelling was a little bit more than nine minutes in both groups. The second storytelling in both groups was shorter than the first time. The difference in the length of the second storytelling between experimental and control group is negligible. This is understandable because the time



difference between the two storytelling was only 3,5 months so children remembered the story well and in second measurement they needed less time in creating the narrative.

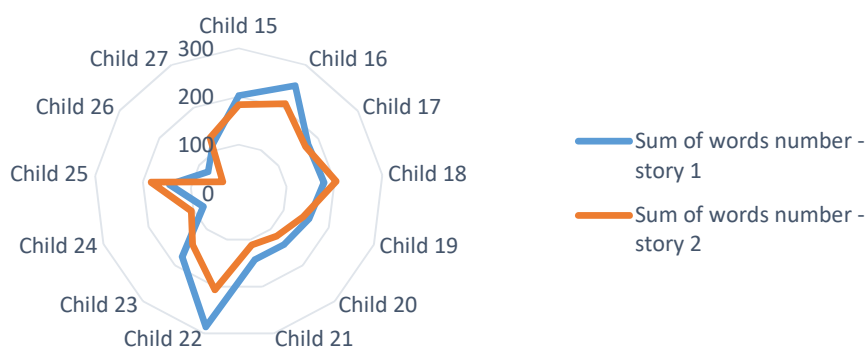
The average length of stories told by boys in experimental group was shorter than those told by girls. In control group it was vice versa –boys' stories lasted longer than girls' stories. As it has already been mentioned to get the more accurate picture, the length of the story needs to be observed together with the data about the number of used words and the accuracy of the story description.

Comparison of the number of used words – experimental group

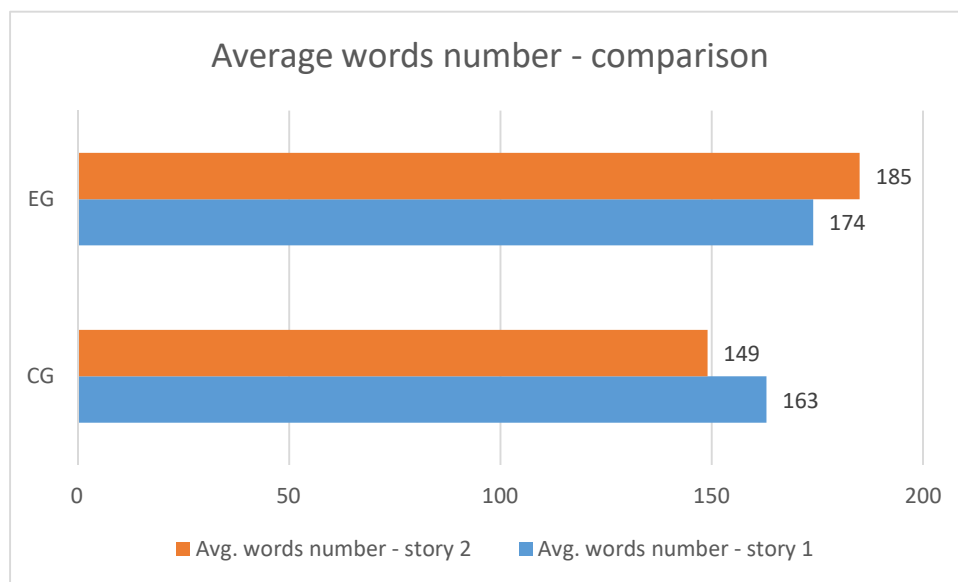


Findings about the number of used words in a story: The overall number of words in the 1st and 2nd storytelling is 9098. Children from experimental group used 15 % more words than those from control group. If is the 1st and the 2nd storytelling of experimental group compared, the results show that in the 2nd storytelling children used 6,4 % more words. Boys increased the number of words for 12 %. Girls used approximately the same number of words (the decrease was only 0,86 %).

Comparison of the number of used words – control group



Based on the number of points given for the accuracy of the story description it can be noticed that one child from experimental group made progress from very good to excellent rank and two children made progress from good to very good rank. In control group two children also made progress from very good to excellent rank but two children dropped from weak to very weak rank and one child dropped from very good to good rank.



It is apparent that children from experimental group made progress and that the progress is uniformed.

In order to put the data obtained by this measuring activity into context, some interviews and questionnaires have also been done. Adult persons connected to the implementation of the activity have been interviewed. Pre-school teacher observed children during the reading aloud activity and was also interviewed at the beginning of the project and near its end. In the questionnaire parents are asked to share their own observations related to the degree of progress they noticed in their children. Observations and comments of the teachers providing the reading aloud activity were collected in the form of interview and questionnaire.

In such a way qualitative data on the implementation of planned activity have been gathered. Based on the results it can be concluded that all the interviewed people mentioned a positive effect of the reading aloud activity: parents of children from experimental group, teachers who have been implementing the activity and pre-school teacher as well.

Lastly, collected data have been analysed, quantitative indicators have been compared and connected to the statements gotten from the interviews.



Reading aloud activity

Findings

Conclusions based on the comparison of experimental and control group results:

- in both groups the length of the 2nd storytelling was shorter
- there are no significant differences connected to the gender of the children in relation to how long their stories lasted
- children in experimental group used 15 % more words than those in control group; in the 2nd storytelling children from experimental group used 6,4 % more words, and the number of words used by children in control group was less by 18,1 %.
- as for the accuracy of the story, children from experimental group have shown a consistent progress.
- crucial research indicator is also parents' educational level and families' social status. Seven parents from experimental group have a university degree compared to 2 from control group. Parents of children from experimental group have a higher social status because only 3 mothers are unemployed while there are 6 unemployed parents in control group.

Conclusions connected to the monitoring of implementation of reading aloud activity:

- parents of children from experimental group noticed positive reactions of their children to the implementation of the reading aloud activity
- teachers who did the activity point out that the children were attentive, interested and joyful
- pre-school teacher believes that the activity was encouraging and useful in developing children's concentration as well as communication with new, unfamiliar adults.
- special needs education teacher concludes that the analysis of verbal-linguistic abilities could be used for planning a way how to help children whose results have not been so good.



Reading aloud activity

Some of these conclusions can be used on a local level, related to our school and community, but some of them could be useful to partners in the RECEPTION project as well.

How important reading stories is, could never be emphasised enough – that's the conclusion that the 1st grade teachers can take out from this research. Exact data can substantiate how important it is to intensively work on the development of pre-reading skills and on the enriching of a child's vocabulary (especially at the beginning of the 1st grade) – much more important than following the prescribed plans and programmes which have been designed on a national level for imaginary average population.

These arguments can also be used in working with parents to make them aware that today's school requirements are not the same as when they went to school, that it is important to efficiently work with their children at home which does not mean to take the role of a teacher but to spend quality time socializing with their children, talking to them and this conversation can also be prompted by reading a quality picture book.

This case study research can also be used as a concrete argument to show the decision makers on a local level the need for additional work with pre-school children. It can be done through an initiative for founding a kindergarten in the municipality of Gornja Stubica or to increase the number of hours of pre-school programme in Elementary School Matije Gupca Gornja Stubica. Including resources and school capacity in working with pre-school children should be additionally evaluated and adequate financial support should be asked for. All the above mentioned activities are supposed to be financed by local authority because according to the law of the Republic of Croatia local authorities are responsible for pre-school education.

When a research is being done, some unexpected activities can prove to be useful and beneficial. For example, it can be assumed that the instructions for reading aloud activity will be useful for teachers who have just started working. But parents can use them as well.

Most of the teachers who have taken part in doing this research have never before encountered therapeutically Susan Perrow's stories. All of them have noticed the positive effect these stories have on children. The recommendation to use these therapeutically stories in everyday work can also be given to new teachers.



Reading aloud activity

As far as research tools are concerned, there are certainly other instruments which can be used to measure pupils' achievements. But the tables which have been used, made by Dragan Lisica are easy to use and maybe this argument will be crucial for other teachers who decide to do the same kind of research. In Elementary school Matije Gupca Gornja Stubica it would definitely be useful to do the same research with pre-school children over a few more years to get more relevant data which could be used for different analysis. The fact that teachers themselves did the research is particularly valuable. In such a way they got the exact indicators of pupils' achievement so they do not have to rely only on their impressions or experience. They have become qualified to create their own database which can be used in their future work.

Analysing the measured data, the conclusion is that verbal-linguistic skills of children who have been exposed to the intensive activity of reading stories aloud have developed better than in children who have not been exposed to such an incentive. Susan Perrow's therapeutically stories that have been used, have proven to be encouraging and well accepted by children. It has been noted that the children have reacted extremely positively on the activity of reading stories aloud.

Why does this example of good practice work? The answer to this question lies in the fact that reading stories is important in the development of passive as well as active vocabulary in children. Although the enriching of a child's vocabulary happens primarily at home, in cases of deprived family environment it is necessary to intensify the incentive in pre-school educational institutions. In the specific local context of Elementary School Matije Gupca Gornja Stubica these findings are extremely important because they provide some explanation why the results of some children have been on a rather low level.

Final recommendation

Croatian RECEPTION team has analysed the method of the activity of intensive reading stories aloud with children who attended pre-school programme in Elementary School Matije Gupca Gornja Stubica. The conclusion is that the children who were exposed to the activity of intensive reading stories aloud developed their verbal-linguistic skills better than those who were not exposed to such an incentive. Australian writer Susan Perrow's therapeutically stories were used in this activity. The stories were encouraging and children reacted extremely well to them. It should also be emphasised that for the activity to be successful the appropriate preparation of the person who reads the story plays an important role.

Why have precisely these results been obtained? The answer lies in the fact that reading stories has an important role in enriching passive, as well as active vocabulary in children which is furthermore important



in developing phonemic consciousness in children. In Croatian language phonemic consciousness is the basis for the reading ability which is in the 1st grade practised and adopted. Although the enriching of a child's vocabulary primarily happens at home, in the cases of deprived family environment it is important to intensively work with these children in the institutions of pre-school education. In the local context of Elementary School Matije Gupca Gornja Stubica these findings are crucial because they explain why some children had weaker results.

Finally, although not less important, by reading stories readers and passionate readers are being brought up. Readers are persons who read fluently with comprehension which is an ability needed for further education and learning in general. A passionate reader is person who enjoy reading and this ability affects and raises overall life quality.



First class pupils

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DENMARK CASE STUDY

“Be aware and walk with caution – here we create people”

Ref. Kresten Kold 1816-1870. A Danish teacher, pedagogue and a pioneer within the Danish School System.

In all six countries, the Reception Project focuses upon how we give children a firm foundation on which they enable them to attain an education. In Denmark, we have chosen to focus on two topics, which are resilience and communication. These topics have an important influence on how a student can complete their course of education. At our three school's we work with language, play, music and how physical activities can support a positive development towards being resilient and master good communication.

Resilience means that a child can become robust within the school system, being ready to face the demands and expectations required of them.

Communication is important in relationships, teaching, well-structured conversations with both children and parents and it has influence on the daily work, wellbeing and education in general.

To understand the Danish school system's aspirations and challenges, it is essential to understand the topics, our values and how a Danish teacher approach the task. The Scandinavian school system model is different to looking at other European and English-speaking school systems.

Schools in Denmark have a common understanding approach to develop a plan and to set a framework for the daily work involved. Each municipality has the responsibility to meet national goals and aims. For our schools in Albertslund, we have a local strategy "Schools for all". This strategy describes our values and priorities and allow us to have a common language when making choices that are particular to Albertslund.

The Danish School system has national common objectives. There is a general perception of how schools should act in Denmark, and in Albertslund as well as other municipalities, we follow and respect the following goals and aims:

1. In cooperation with pupil's parents, the schools must ensure that the pupil will acquire knowledge and skills to prepare them for further education, inspiring them to learn more, understanding Danish and other countries' culture and history as well as having an understanding of how people live together with nature which helps a child develop their social skills.
2. The schools develop and offer different methods and approaches for experience, interest and enterprise, which leads to developing recognition and imagination, building a pupils' ability to seek opportunities for their future.
3. The schools prepare children to participate, take responsibility and to learn about rights and duties within a society of freedom and democracy. The school's commitment should be characterized by encouraging freedom of speech and openness.

Point 2. The individual school's principal is responsible for the quality of delivery as per legislation, and well as the head of the Department for Schools and Education is responsible when it comes to how the municipality secure the quality.

In Alberstlund we prioritize life skills (Dannelse), wellbeing and building partnerships. When it comes to values, the Danish way of thinking is that, teachers can choose different methods of teaching when planning their lessons.

The key focus is that teachers and social educators or pedagogues work together as a team for example using action learning when planning lessons, subject matter and attending classes.

Referring to and using these topics enables us to understand the way we have chosen to work with our cases. It is essential to know that they are connected, but, learning from our experiences, we constantly review our policies and procedures to ensure future improvement.

To explain why “Dannelse” (a word which cannot be found in the English vocabulary) is such an important word in our Danish culture. It is difficult for others to understand why this means so much for us. It is a long process about developing an individual from childhood to adulthood with respect to their “life skills”. As individuals, we all have different learning styles and interests, therefore we look to not only use subjects at school, but we also use activities, relationships and working within communities to help understanding; learning how we should react accordingly.

Dannelse is incorporated into all aspects of the Danish way of living, whether it is regarding how we act within a democracy, work with IT, read literature, care for the environment, our history and how we interact with each other when we are together to improve our relationships and how we communicate. In the school system Dannelse is within every subject, communication, relationships and the way we teach and act in a classroom. It takes many years to create a person with life skill’s but that is what we do in our school.

It is closely connected to our two cases (see below) and therefore it is beneficial to describe to others important topics to help understanding of why we think and act the way we do.

Wellbeing for us means that we feel safe and secure. When we can trust our relationships it gives us satisfaction and resilience in our daily life and in the school. It gives us a much better position to understand, experiment and at the end, to learn. The surroundings are important to children at any stage of their learning. If we have a positive focus on wellbeing it will help us develop individually as well as a part of a class. Life gives us challenges but in safe and trustworthy surroundings we are much more willing to be active, curious and ready to receive knowledge.

In Albertslund our priority is the community. Including Dannelse within how we function as a democracy and the use of IT, allows these priorities to be of high value which means a lot in the relationships at the schools.

A Danish teacher not only plans lessons from the national aims and goals. First of all they look at their class, knowing what the goals and aims are for a subject to plan a schedule, choosing methods, approaches and materials that all relates to the group of children they teach. The teacher have a free choice when looking for materials as well as methods.

In March 2018 changes were made regarding the overall goals for competences – what pupils must learn. Therefor we now have the overall goals that everybody has to follow while we have guidelines for skills and knowledge.

Listed below are the national goals and aims for teaching, compiled by the ministry for Education:

1. The school must challenge all its pupils to ensure they can fulfil their potential.
2. The school must reduce or minimize the significance of social background when we look at results
3. When looking at results, the school should disregard the significance of the pupil’s social background.
4. Trust and wellbeing In the School must be strengthened for example through respect for professional knowledge and practice.
5. Having respect for professional knowledge and experience builds on trust and wellbeing within a school.

Every subject taught has its own objectives within which guidance can be used if the teacher wishes. Each school principal receives and accepts the teachers plan for the coming school year.

In 2014 a new school reform introduced Movement was one of the new focus’s for the school. It is expected that teachers in every subject plan movement activities on an average of 45 minutes every day.

Physical activities are essential for concentration and motivation. Having a varied day and teaching plan helps resilience and prevent boredom and create an active school day for all pupils and again

Cooperation and a common understanding of how the daily work is done in the classroom are important within the Danish school system, especially in Albertslund.

The teachers prefer to teach their special subject and belong to a team of teachers and social educators.

The social educators are important collaborators in the classroom for both teachers and pupils. They support the work in the classroom – not as teachers but to support classroom management and activities.

The three schools participating in the project

Herstedvester School is a school with a primary section consisting of 392 pupils. The teachers work in teams on every grade together with social educators.

In the project Herstedvester school is represented by the principal Nieller Mandrup and head of the primary section by Kirsten Ingemann.

Herstedlund school is a school with a primary section consisting of 264 pupils. The teachers work in teams on every grade together with social educators.

In the project Herstedlund skole is represented by the principal Søren Hald and a teacher with the responsibility for the reception Bente Johannessen.

The Brøndager school is a special school for children diagnosed with different types of autism. The school is connected to the project as an associated partner. The school has 96 pupils in different classes and 125 teachers and social educators working in teams and connected to special children.

In the project the Brøndager school is represented by the principal Metted Deibjerg Rasmussen and a head of the primary section Tine Zeuner.

Cases

Herstedvester School work with two local cases to support the overall cases on resilience and communication.

Language and motor skills in two of the four classes on the 0. grade.

In the coming year the focus will be on language development and language understanding.

The children in one of the classes will meet a teacher/pedagogue with special qualifications regarding the development of children's language 90 minutes on a weekly basis.

The children in the other class will meet a teacher/pedagogue with special qualifications regarding motor skills.

A program has been made and the children are to work on the motor skills twice a week.

Focus on language and the language development is also a part of the motor skills program.

The school will look into and document how a program with this special focus on language and motor skills can give the children resilience and communication skills and readiness in the process of reception.

Both programs will be repeated next school year



Herstedlund school is working on how to build a bridge from kindergarten to the school. In the beginning of the Reception project the school wanted only to work on language skills. In Denmark the two institutions are placed on different parcels and to make the children more aware of what is going on in the school we need to make the reception more specific and clear. The aims and goals for kindergarten are very different from those in the school system.

It was not only the language and good communication that made a good reception it was also the adults, the social educators as well-known and recognizable persons that made the children feel safe and robust in the reception process.

The program is therefore first of all to have a pedagogue to be present in the kindergarten and follow the children into the school.

One day every week the children meet a pedagogue who present a story/ storytelling.



Also:

Plays that is about how to listen

Rhymes and chants

Sentences – looking into what they consist of Different kinds of words – long and short words

Syllables

This program will be repeated when the children enter the school and will be supported with drawing exercises that can train and strengthen the understanding of reading and writing.

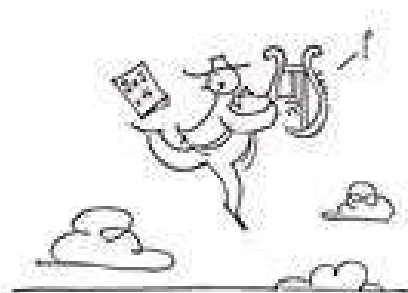
Brøndager school has chosen to focus on how music can have an effect on wellbeing, togetherness, feelings, memories and motor skills.

There is no explanation why music can have an effect on children with autism but the children in general reacts with smiles and joy when they to music. We know that we cannot do music when we are angry or for example sad.

The children have met a music teacher/pedagogue for two periods and have gone through a planned program. Is was necessary in the program to build a good contact among the children. Therefore the children sang songs together, made plays using language, doing rhythm exercises and using supporting movement to the texts.

We saw how the children made their community in the small group. They participated all with their different abilities. They got more and more active and creative alone and together. The planned program were be challenged and changed in the period. The children became more flexible because the children took the initiative to do things differently. Of course they could always return to the planned program, but it turns out not to be as important as it used to be.

The children changed in many ways but especially when it came to the community activities at the school the music lesson had a positive effect on how they participated.



*I skolen lærer man
de små tabeller.
I livet lær man,
at de ikke gælder.*

Piet Hein

Translation:

In the school you learn to multiply

In life you learn that the result are not valid.

GREECE CASE STUDY

“Myths unite us”

Transition Program

Overview

The main aim of the Directorate of Western Thessaloniki is to find, organize and practice innovative projects in all school institutions within its jurisdiction in order to eliminate difficulties and obstacles to school attendance and to reinforce the educational process in schools. In this context, we attempted the application of innovative interventions, which aimed to facilitate the transition from Kindergarten to Elementary School.

Specifically, in the Case Study “Myths unite us”, our aim was to design, implement and evaluate a program focused in the smooth transition from Kindergarten to Elementary School in order to generalise its implementation in the majority of the school units settled in Western Thessaloniki.

The program has been evaluated on a lasting basis, thus means before, during and after its implementation, using questionnaires, class observation, discussions among all stakeholders, data from logs and diaries.

The evaluation of the program showed the benefits derived from that participation by all stakeholders, students, teachers and parents. We consider as positive aspects of the program: the enhancement of children's socialization, their emotional empowerment, the children's response to the program's activities and the positive attitude towards the school world.

According to the impact of its implementation to the engaged school units, we intent to promote this transition programme to the most of the school units belonging to the Directorate of Western Thessaloniki, through seminars and workshops for teachers.



Context

The role of the kindergarten as a bridge to elementary school is very important. Education here should aim at a smooth and effortless transformation of the preschooler to a schoolchild. In the past, there was no official reference in the Greek educational legislation on the transition process and on practices that would facilitate it. Cooperation between kindergartens and elementary school institutions was not a frequent phenomenon, especially in those cases when they were not housed in the same building; but even when they were, it didn't seem to make any difference.

Last years, various changes to educational legislation *and consequently to school practices* have taken place in Greece.

The new *Presidential Decree 79/2017* (that regulates the operation of pre-school and primary education) provides for the following on the transition: *“With a view to improving cooperation between kindergarten and elementary school and ensuring a smooth transition of pupils from one level to another, at the end of the school year for students and before the beginning of the next school year, pedagogical meetings are organized with the participation of the Teachers' Association of kindergartens, the principals of the co-located or neighboring kindergartens with the elementary schools and with the teachers who will teach in the First Primary School in order to discuss education issues and proficiency of kindergarten students that will attend primary school.”*

In this context, each school unit has the chance to choose among a series of actions and implement them with the cooperation of education related stakeholders.



For example, apart from acquaintance and familiarization visits of kindergarten children to Elementary School, which was the most usual “practice” in neighbor schools the last years, the following indicative actions and activities can be applied:

- Development of thematic work plans (projects) to the kindergartens in collaboration with the 1st or 2nd Grade of Elementary schools
- Awareness and informing of the parents and the local community institutions, in relation to the educational process of transition, by regular open meetings in order to prepare the parents for their new role as parents of pupils of primary school
- Organizing exhibitions, theatrical and other events by the kindergarten students in cooperation with elementary school students.

Various educational programs for the transition from Kindergarten to Elementary school apply to many of the 240 Kindergartens and the 183 Elementary schools in Western Thessaloniki. Many of these programs are based in contemporary pedagogical approaches such as Intercultural Education and Cooperative Learning. The participation of the parents and their cooperation with the educators from both stages (kindergarten and elementary school) is a challenging aspect of these programs. The systematic evaluation of them will prove their effectiveness.

The Case Study presented in this report was chosen because it was a well-organized long-term intervention with socio-emotional, pedagogical and cognitive components, which aimed to facilitate the transition from kindergarten to elementary school through cooperation and interaction processes.

Implementation of the Transition Program: “Myths unite us”

Participants

Two school partnerships joined in one transition program:



The program was implemented simultaneously through the following two partnerships:

1. Twenty-three (23) pupils of the 2nd Grade of the 17th Elementary School of Evosmos and thirty-six (36) toddlers of the 32nd Kindergarten of Evosmos
2. Forty-three (43) 2nd Grade pupils of the 10th Elementary School of Evosmos and thirty-six (36) toddlers of the 8th Kindergarten of Evosmos

All these children worked together under the guidance and support of seventeen (17) teachers of various disciplines for six months from January to June 2018.

There was also involvement of the parents from the beginning of the initiative's implementation.

The context of the program

Considering the theoretical framework related to: a) school climate b) prevention of school bullying c) intercultural education and d) cooperative learning, we created a program that aims at smooth transition from kindergarten to elementary school, through myths and traditional fairy tales. It is a program that embraced diversity and engaged all children. The program was designed to cultivate bonds of friendship and understanding among children and also to develop cooperation skills by dealing with myths and fairy tales and performing various artistic creations that in turn represent familiar and unfamiliar cultures.

More specifically, our goals:

- Regarding the axis of student's interactions, they mainly concern the cultivation of social skills, familiarity and willingness to cooperate, as well as the development of positive bonds and caring between pupils of different ages and cognitive levels. The development of such skills and bonds hopefully leads and supports the smooth transition of kindergarten children to primary school, while at the same time they create a positive school climate among children who in the immediate future will become students in the same school environment.
- Regarding the axis of the intercultural education, they concern the cultivation of intercultural awareness and understanding. Children learn about other cultures through representative myths, fairy tales and ethnic artistic techniques but they also have the opportunity to identify common cultural elements, perceptions and quests between them and their own culture. Through this process they become familiar with what they are used to characterize as "foreign" and "different" and they perceive our common roots as humanity.
- Regarding the axis of academic skills' cultivation (literacy and mathematics) we expected children: a) to come in contact with various alphabets, b) to perceive and familiarize – as much as possible – to traditional texts that represent familiar and unfamiliar cultures, c) to cultivate their linguistic skills, d) to use basic mathematical concepts and elements (numeracy, basic calculations, patterns, symmetry).
- Regarding the axis of artistic skills' cultivation our goals concern: a) the acquiring of knowledge b) the experimentation with various materials and techniques b) the ability to express ideas, feelings and experiences d) the development of interest and desire to participate in artistic activities.

Planning and Organizing the Activities

We attempted to reinforce emotionally the kindergarten pupils and cultivate smooth and positive relationships between them and elementary school pupils.

It was essential for us to ensure that regardless of age, cognitive level, gender, race, religion, socio-economic status etc., every single child would feel that has his or her own value and must be identified as an equal partner and friend.

According to the aforementioned, the participant teachers organized the whole teaching procedure creating activities that meet the level of both ages so that children of both age groups feel equal and co-operate on equal terms, in such a way that younger children would not feel insufficiently. The only case that this equilibrium was disrupted was during the activities that included writing skills.

"Myths unite us" in action



We applied the cooperative learning method by organizing the children to work in mixed groups of 4-6 children, but they also alternated in such a way that they all would get to know each other and work with everyone. In every classroom there was equal number of kindergarten students and 2nd graders and at least one kindergarten teacher and one primary school teacher working together.



Correspondingly teachers cooperated and taught together in their new mixed classes at least for two hours per week. Also teachers' meetings were frequently held, in order to evaluate the initiative's progress, to select new activities and to organize the whole teaching procedure in every detail.



We could refer to this program as a “trip all over the world” through myths and fairy tales that survived for centuries and are representative of the cultural heritage of the peoples who created them. Various literature products and techniques of artistic creation stemming from the traditions of the peoples and reflecting our common cultural roots were used. We have chosen texts that share common elements and highlight our common quests as people, regardless of our geographical identity, race, color or religion. We enriched them with a variety of activities that were dealing with iconic symbols of each country, such as historical architecture monuments, ethnic artistic elements, local flora and fauna, alphabets etc. We also created our own story books, plays, board games and floor games, collages, masks. Finally, we performed traditional music and dances from each country we “visited”.

Additionally, we organized a branch of joined activities such as:

- A visit to the Macedonian Folklore Museum of Thessaloniki
- Attendance of a theatrical performance inspired by an ancient Greek myth
- Gymnastic courses in the Primary school's playground
- Exhibition of children's artistic products
- A performance with all the participants. Dramatized myths and traditional foreign music and dances were performed by our students

- A farewell picnic at the end of the school year
- Seminars for the parents and open meetings for the parents.

Aims and Methods

Our aim was to design, implement and evaluate an effective program focused on the smooth transition from Kindergarten to Elementary School. Through a variety of activities we tried to unite and familiarize students of two different school levels: (a) among themselves, fostering ties and emotional intimacy, especially for children from kindergarten in order to eliminate their fears and worries about Primary school (b) among them and well-known and unknown “Others” through an intercultural approach.

The transition program was designed and implemented as is depicted above and was evaluated through the following methods and procedures:

Prior to the implementation of the program, questionnaires were given to the participating pupils, teachers and parents in order to record their concerns, aspirations and fears about the transition of the toddlers to primary school.

From the beginning till the end of the program, teachers were keeping logs and diaries in which they were recording actions, activities and also their personal experiences and significant comments of class observations. During the implementation of the program regular meetings of the participating teachers were held, where one of the main aims was the assessment of the initiative’s progress and the impact of the program to the children.

Furthermore, through discussions among teachers themselves, among teachers and parents, but also among teachers and children, we gradually gained a better awareness of the whole procedure.

At the completion of the program, questionnaires were also given to all the participants (pupils, teachers, parents) in order to identify its potentialities and probably some weak points.

Findings

According our observations, the discussions with all the participants and through a preliminary analysis⁴ of the questionnaires we found out that among the participants have been cultivated mutual trust and respect. It is very significant that teachers and parents identified that one of the most important aspect of the program is the children’s social and emotional empowerment.

As for the participating children, most of them declared that during the transition program they learnt how to cooperate in different learning and playing environments, they developed better understanding of the way that other children think and behave, and finally – after the completion of the program – they consider their colleagues as friends. Furthermore, kindergarten pupils at the end of the program noticed that they feel more confident to attend primary school. Evaluating the program itself, the most of the children of the two school levels characterized the activities as “interesting”, “pleasant” and “not at all difficult”. Finally, the vast majority of respondents expressed a desire for the continuation of the program next year.

Conclusions

We estimate that our program can contribute to the smooth transition of kindergarten pupils to elementary school, by empowering them at the socio-emotional level, limiting their concerns and fears. It can also significantly improve cooperative skills and the level of empathy of the older children.

⁴ Questionnaires will be fully analysed during July 2018.



Furthermore, the reciprocal communication among teachers of the two school levels and their cooperation can also create the appropriate degree of continuity and compatibility between the two school levels, facilitating each child's development as a capable learner.

Finally the program's impact on the school climate could be evaluated as very significant, as it established positive relationships between children, parents and educators.

For all these reasons we could propose its dissemination and implementation in the local educational context, whereas we think it could also contribute to the national and/or international dialogue for the RECEPTION Challenge.



ICELAND CASE STUDY

Case study, Langholtsskóli, Iceland

Overview

The fact that a dramatically high percentage of college drop-outs in Iceland are bilingual students, or children with other mother tongue than Icelandic, made us want to investigate in this case study, whether there is something that could be done better as early as in kindergarten.

In this case study we compared three different diagnostic tests used in the last year of kindergarten and the first year in elementary school and the findings lead us to conclude that there are in fact indications as early as in kindergarten telling us what to expect but since the information remains at each school stage, another test is used in elementary schools and precious time has been lost.

We must therefore improve the quality of transitions between preschool and primary education by using information gained at earlier stages and benefit from them. We must join hands and work towards our joint goal; to find bilingual students who are likely to have difficulties with reading and start early intervention in order to reduce ESL (early school leaving) and other forms of educational disadvantages and underachievement in later years.



Context

The Icelandic school system

The vast majority of children in Iceland go to kindergarten, which is considered to be the first schoolstage and attendance in kindergarten is seen as important preparation for elementary school attendance. Municipalities subsidise costs for kindergarten but parents pay a share of the costs themselves. In the same year as the child turns six he/she starts elementary school in the fall. Elementary schools are mandatory. Children and adolescents, 6-16 years of age, attend elementary schools which consists of ten grades, 1st grade to 10th grade. There are no entrance requirements at this school level and all pupils have the right to attend school in the area where they live.



Immigrants are a fast growing addition to the population of Iceland

Even though 95% of students with Icelandic as a mother tongue enroll in college this number is significantly lower for immigrants, at 86%. In recent years, the number of drop-outs from college have been rising notably. A dramatically high percentage of drop-outs are bilingual, or children with a different mother tongue than Icelandic. The Minister of Education stated in Parliament, 2016-2017, that 26% of students of Icelandic origin had left college before graduation but 62% of students registered as immigrants.

In our case study, we wanted to look at diagnostic tests taken in preschool and examine the results closely. Are there any signs there which indicate the outcome for these particular students in elementary school and later in college? Are we losing talents since these students are not getting enough support in the early years? How can we identify them and what are the best ways to improve and support the training needs of educational and other Early Years workers addressing the relationships between pre-school and primary education in order to reduce Early School Leaving and other forms of educational disengagement and underachievement in later years.

Hljóm: a diagnostic test in preschools

Since 2001 the majority of preschools in Reykjavik have used a diagnostic test called *Hljóm*, a screening tool designed specifically for preschool teachers to identify children at risk of developing reading difficulties, measure the development of the language, to analyse the comprehension of sound and the use of language of all children before they start elementary school. Preschool teachers can administer this test only after receiving special training.



It has been used for the purpose of analysing children who might have problems with reading later on in order to start early intervention. Poor comprehension of sound and the use of language indicates reading problems in nine out of ten children. The years at preschool are therefore extremely important for early intervention. Bilingual children or children with another mother tongue than Icelandic often have below average results from *Hljóm*. It is important to monitor these children's progress closely and continue working with early intervention.

LTL, a diagnostic test in Elementary schools

LTL ("Leið til læsis" Eng: "The road to literacy") is a diagnostic test, used in the first weeks of Elementary schools, which measures knowledge of letters, sound analysis and language development.

In the autumn of 2016, when we started our Reception case study, we started cooperation with the four preschools in the surrounding area that send their students to Langholtsskóli. We started by comparing the

results from Hljóm to the results from LTL to see if these tests are comparable and found out that they were indeed.

The results of both these tests strongly indicate that our focus group, first and second generation immigrants, could have been identified earlier and close monitoring and intervention started.

An example to clarify our findings is the results of a bilingual student who, after dividing her time between two countries, scored well below average at her Hljóm test, or 17 points out of 71 points. Her results from LTL confirmed her language status.

- Language developments: two SD below average
- Letter knowledge one SD below average
- Phonological awareness two SD below average.

After getting help, all through her first grade, from a special ed teacher, such as nursery rhymes, working at vocabulary, singing etc. For the parents there were worksheets to do at home targeting those electives she entered her first grade reaching the reading goals in the national curriculum.

Milli mála - Between languages



The results from the diagnostic tests taken, both Hljóm and LTL, and the growing number of immigrant students lead us to take a closer look at yet another diagnostic test submitted in January, when first graders have spent one semester in elementary school. This test is called “Milli mála” or “Between languages” and was made by Elín Þöll Þórðardóttir PhD and associate professor at McGill University in Montreal, Canada. It is specially made for immigrant students and was submitted to over 1400 elementary immigrant students in 2014-15 (not only in the Greater Reykjavik area). The purpose of the test was to evaluate if these students were fluent enough in Icelandic to benefit from the schooling in their grade. This test gives a more detailed evaluation than earlier tests since it is the first diagnostic test made in Icelandic but not translated from another language. Its content is made of vocabulary and speech found in textbooks used in schools. The conclusion indicates strongly that students who have Icelandic as a second

language need significant support to be able to follow their peers at school or 65% of students with one or both parents non Icelandic.

When all three diagnostic tests are compared, Hljóm, LTL and Between Languages, they all indicate the same results. When children live in a language environment different from Icelandic, they are rarely fluent enough in Icelandic to benefit from their teaching.

Conclusions

It is said that it takes 1 - 2 years to become fluent enough in a language to be able to engage in a social environment but it can take up to 6 - 7 years to gain “academic skills” or the skills needed to understand the language at school (Cummins, 2004; Elín Þöll Þórðardóttir, 2012).

In order for children to gain active bilingualism they need to be surrounded with both their new language and their mother tongue. It is therefore very important to use all opportunities well both in school and in all after school programs where children get opportunities to interact with peers, teachers and other staff who speak fluent Icelandic. The time spent in an Icelandic environment is crucial since children need to spend 50% of their waking hours in a rich language environment in order to reach good skills. Elín Þöll's “Between languages” test showed that children who had gained sufficient skills spent over 40% of their waking hours in an Icelandic environment.

The Icelandic school day is shorter than in some of our neighboring countries, and even though after school programs are available they are not mandatory. When immigrant children move to Iceland and start elementary school they are offered three free months of after school programs. Other immigrant children might not participate in any other leisure programs, the possible reasons being it's not mandatory and it is not free of charge. Groups of students, born in Iceland, with one or both parents being non-Icelandic, do therefore not spend enough waking hours in Icelandic environment in order to become academically skilled. Considering the huge effect this has, this case-study has led to the conclusion that all bilingual children, born in or outside of Iceland, should get access to free after school programs in order to increase the input in their new language.

Diagnostic tests as Hljóm, LTL and “Between languages” are a very important factor in indicating students status in Icelandic. In order to get the most out of these tests, results must be looked at closely and identified thoroughly. Once identified, work with special problems or lack of skills must start. As soon as in kindergarten, students that underperform in Hljóm must get additional training in their lacking skills the last nine months before they move up to elementary school. Effective work, stimulation and motivation must start immediately and progress must be assessed in order to evaluate the work. This work must then continue in elementary school and is evaluated in LTL.

Article

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The Power of Play to Promote Wellbeing and Connections with Others for Children with Autism Spectrum Differences: Are we Listening to What the Research and the Children are Telling us?

Dr. Emer Ring, Dr. Lisha O'Sullivan & Dr. Kathleen Horgan

Abstract

Children with autism spectrum differences (ASD) play in their own unique ways and differences between children with ASD and neurotypical children include differences in spontaneous play, social play and pretend play (Jarrold and Conn, 2011). In this article we use the term 'autism spectrum difference' rather than 'autism spectrum disorder' to avoid conceptualising children's abilities and needs from a negative and deficient perspective (Ring, McKenna and Wall, 2015). Findings from a recent national evaluation of education provision for children with ASD suggest that children with ASD see opportunities to play as an important feature of their educational experience (Daly and Ring et al., 2016). We argue that the observed differences in the play of children with ASD are not commensurate with a lack of motivation to play or a capacity to benefit from play. Amid increasing concerns for child wellbeing at policy level (Smyth, 2015), the authors suggest that opportunities for child-directed play should be an integral feature of education programmes for children with ASD, given the power of play to support wellbeing and children's connections with others.

Introduction

Children learn and develop through play and play is associated with a range of emotional, social, cognitive and academic gains (Bonfield and Horgan, 2016). While children clearly benefit when teachers intentionally use play as a context to work towards curriculum learning goals, they also benefit from opportunities to direct their own play. Research consistently indicates that self-directed play contributes to emotional well-being and connections with others (Gray, 2015). The autobiographical accounts of adults with ASD further emphasise the importance child-directed play for well-being and connecting with others during childhood (Conn, 2015; 2016). However, a preoccupation with outcomes coupled with a tight schedule of interventions, can lead to reduced opportunities for play in educational programmes for children with ASD (Mastrangelo, 2009). Moreover, the research suggests that children with ASD in mainstream educational settings can experience social isolation, loneliness and rejection (Chamberlain, Kasari and Rotheram-Fuller, 2007). Child-directed play offers a powerful mechanism through which these challenges can be overcome.

Difference or Disorder?

Up until the recent publication of The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-V) (American Psychiatric Association (APA), 2013), autism or autistic spectrum disorder was described as being identified by a triad of impairments in social interaction, patterns of communication and flexibility of thought and behaviour (Ring et al., 2015). While the current classification system also includes these areas, a further welcome dimension refers to a child's hyper/hypo reactivity to sensory input or an unusual interest in sensory-related aspects of the environment. The concept of 'disorder' as a defining feature of autism continues to be challenged by individuals with autism and their families who describe their experiences in terms of 'difference' (Greene, 2006). In accordance with the position adopted by Ring, Daly and Wall (2018), this article rejects 'disorder' in favour of 'difference' and maintains a focus on the role of parents and

educators in responding to, and accommodating these differences through optimising children's access to play.

Are Children with Autism Spectrum Differences Motivated to Play?

Prior to exploring the motivation of children with ASD to engage in play, we need to be clear around what play actually entails. Gray (2013), conceptualises play as a motive characterised by choice, a means over ends focus, imagination, self-chosen rules and an active, non-stressed mind-set. Once afforded the opportunity, children with ASD certainly act autonomously even if this involves pursuing a more constricted range of interests. When children with ASD engage in preferred activities, it is the activity itself (means) rather than any external reward (ends) which motivates them. Much of the play experienced by children with ASD, however, can be adult rather than child-controlled (Mastrangelo, 2009; Conn, 2015). Play involves self-chosen rules which can be observed in the play of children with ASD when they make up rules around how objects are organised or how games are played. Pretend play is highly imaginative, and spontaneous generation of pretence is recognised as challenging for children with ASD (Jarrold and Conn, 2011). Jarrold and Conn (2011), propose a performance rather than competence deficit meaning that children with ASD can engage in pretence but for several reasons, are less motivated to do so. The autobiographical literature provides further evidence that many children with ASD both engage in and enjoy pretence even if it is less improvisational than the pretence of neurotypical children (Conn, 2015). Many children with ASD are competent at using visual media to represent their imagination and the exceptional drawing abilities of some children with ASD are well documented (Scott, 2013; Ring et al., 2015). This suggests that for children with ASD who find pretending difficult, other symbolic forms of play, such as play with visual media, might offer a more accessible mode of expression and communication. However, this is not to dismiss the value of teaching pretend play skills given the contribution of this type of play to language, self-regulation, symbolic thinking and emotional well-being (O' Sullivan and Ring, 2016). Finally, when the conditions support them to do so, children with ASD can demonstrate an active non-stressed mind-set when they become deeply absorbed in activities. The autobiographies of adults with ASD suggest, however, that the extent of absorption in sensory play activities can go somewhat beyond that experienced by neurotypical children with many recalling difficulties disengaging from such activities (Conn, 2015; 2016). Supporting children with ASD framing their play experiences may be of particular pedagogical relevance in this regard. Overall, it is clear that children with ASD demonstrate the motive or attitude we define as play and can benefit from play in several ways. Consequently, including play in their curriculum should be an educational priority.

The Perspectives of Children with Autism Spectrum Differences on Play

As part of a mixed methods national evaluation of education provision for children with ASD at early years, primary and post-primary levels in mainstream and special education settings (in which one of the present authors was a principal investigator), conversations were conducted with groups of children, augmented by a draw-and-tell approach (Daly and Ring et al., 2016). Data were collected across 24 sites representing the continuum of education provision available for children with ASD from pre-school through to secondary school (see Daly and Ring et al., 2016 for further detail on the sampling framework adopted). Across these sites 29 child conversations were conducted with 41 children. The inclusion of the drawing activity embraced an approach, which was non-hierarchical, inter-subjective and potentially collaborative while affording participants the opportunity to articulate their views in a non-verbal and concrete way (Lewis, 2003). As the images in Figure 1 and Figure 2, illustrate, children with ASD saw opportunities to play, particularly outdoors with friends, as an important part of their educational experience.

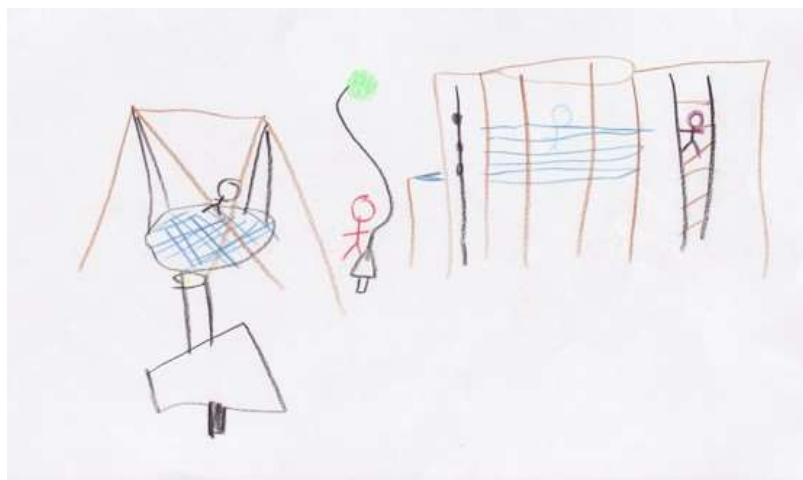


Figure 1: Child at Middle-Primary Level in School Yard with Friends during Breaktime



Figure 2: Child in a Senior Class in a Special School with Friends at School

The conversations with children provided further evidence of the importance of play in these children's education experiences. One child spoke of enjoying being able to 'play with people in yard' while another who drew a picture of the school playground and described each piece of equipment and his favourite places in the playground as he drew. The findings from this research contest the view that children with ASD are less motivated to engage in play, particularly in social play with peers. Critically it suggests that the reason many children with ASD engage less frequently in play is, more related to social, communicative, cognitive and sensory differences than to a lack of motivation per se. Participants in this research clearly valued the contribution of play to their emotional well-being and to their opportunities to connect with others. Acknowledging that wellbeing is a 'multidimensional construct' (Smyth, 2015:1), nevertheless the clear influence of social and emotional relationships on wellbeing is clearly communicated in children's responses and drawings.

Play and Emotional Wellbeing

For play to promote emotional well-being children need to be offered genuine choice, opportunities to practice self-control, a variety of ways to represent ideas and time and space to become absorbed in activities. Crucially, play as an intrinsically motivating activity should not be accompanied by rewards or external evaluation (Gray, 2013). In terms of the type of play which promotes wellbeing, the autobiographical literature suggests that sensory based play activities, in particular, can be associated with feelings of security and wellbeing (Conn, 2015). Spinning, listening to gravel, following the lines of a fence are all examples of experiences recalled as having been deeply pleasurable by adults with ASD (Conn, 2016). It seems that children with ASD value opportunities to make sense of their world through their sensory interactions with it (Conn, 2015; 2016). Consequently, freely chosen play can support wellbeing in a differential way to teacher structured play activities and therapeutic interventions through allowing children engage in play which is pleasurable rather than play which is instrumental in achieving external goals. While the type of play which promotes wellbeing and allows children with ASD make meaning of their world might appear different to the play which meets these needs in neurotypical children, children with ASD are entitled to enjoy the type of play experiences which meet their unique emotional needs. Where the curriculum privileges a narrow range of play experiences, to potential of play to promote wellbeing may not be fully realised for children with ASD (Jarrold & Conn, 2011).

Play and Connections with Others

Children with ASD experience challenges understanding, initiating and maintaining social interactions with others (Papacek, Chai and Green, 2015). They are not less motivated to play with others or to develop friendships, they may simply have a different way of being with others and of being friends (Jarrold and Conn, 2011). Physical proximity, for example, might be more important for some children with ASD than a mental form of companionship (Chamberlain et al., 2007). The autobiographical literature also suggests that despite finding socialising incredibly demanding, many adults with ASD recount their desire for friendship during their childhood years (Conn, 2015; 2016). Teachers generally use a range of strategies to support children with ASD developing communication and social skills and to support peers developing understanding, empathy and tolerance of the diverse interests and behaviours of children with ASD (Papacek et al., 2015). Moreover, through the provision of resources and activities which expand upon individual interests, teachers can encourage children to engage in play which contributes more to learning and social involvement. There is evidence to suggest that incorporating restricted interests can actually decrease stereotyping and increase functional play and social play (Josefi and Ryan, 2004; Watkins et al., 2017). Many adults with ASD report recall finding it easier to socialise with those peers who shared their own interests in some way (Conn, 2015). Given the diversity of children's social and communicative differences, observation and assessment are crucial to matching support to the needs of the learner (Ring et al., 2015). In the absence of adequate supports for children with ASD, the quality and range of connections with their peers decrease with age. However, opportunities for play remain both important and essential throughout early years, primary and post-primary education (Rotheram-Fuller, Kasari, Chamberlain and Locke, 2010).

Conclusion

From the perspective of the development of the whole child, social and emotional development are as important as cognitive development which is often and inappropriately given priority. Cognitive development and associated academic success are, in fact, dependent on emotional well-being and connections with others in the learning community (Deci and Ryan, 2008; Whitebread and Coltman, 2011). Child-directed play makes a unique contribution to these important aspects of development and should be a core feature of educational provision for children with ASD. As play becomes more dominant in educational provision, educators in collaboration with parents need to reflect critically on the purposes for which play is cultivated. While play-based interventions are an invaluable part of educational programmes for children with ASD, they

clearly need to be balanced with opportunities for child-directed play. Opportunities for children to direct their own play make a powerful contribution to emotional well-being which is critical to overall learning success. As skill generalisation is a key aim of curricula for children with ASD, child-directed play can complement teacher-led activities as it gives children with ASD an invaluable context in which to practice emerging social and communication skills. Children participating in the national evaluation (Daly and Ring et al., 2016) provided constructive insights into the power of play to support their emotional well-being and connections with others. The voices of these children and the emerging research should be considered by policy makers, educators and parents to increase the responsiveness of the curriculum to children's needs, particularly their needs in relation to emotional wellbeing and connections with others.

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