

# EARLY YEARS TRANSITION PROGRAMME

## TRANSITION FROM PRE-SCHOOL TO SCHOOL: EMPHASIZING EARLY LITERACY

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

*United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)*



## COMMENTS AND REFLECTIONS BY RESEARCHERS FROM EIGHT EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

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## Foreword

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by Ingrid Pramling Samuelsson & Irene Kaschefi-Haude

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

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

In line with the perspective of life-long learning, there have been and still are on-going discussions in many countries about transitions between different stages in the school system. One of these transitions is the one between early childhood education and primary school, two educational systems that emerged from different traditions and with different intentions. For early childhood education the focus has been the child's development as a whole, but particularly the personal development. Compulsory school on the other hand has had the intention to convey specific areas of knowledge to children. At the same time these two educational systems have begun to narrow one another. In schools there is a growing awareness concerning the importance of the life- experiences children have for further learning, but also how school contributes to the whole life of a child and not only to the development of knowledge. In early childhood education, there is more awareness of young children's potentials and skills in trying to make

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sense of the world around them (Gopnick, Meltzoff, & Kuhl, 1999). This has led to the notion of children as competent learners from early years. Children however, never become more competent than their surroundings, that is, what the teacher provides in the way of experiences and environment (Sommer, 2005). It is important in this discussion to realise that early childhood education is the child's first school, since it is an institution, which has a curriculum or guidelines in how to influence children's learning and development, and there are professionals working to make it happen (Johansson & Pramling Samuelsson, 2003).

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

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

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

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

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

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## Bibliography

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