

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

CHAPTER II

Social Development and the Role of the Preschool from the Viewpoint of the EASE Project

by Johann Pehofer

11.1 Abstract

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

11.2 Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

11.3 Autonomy of the child

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

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

11.4 Significance of the pre-school

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

¹The term “pre-school” will henceforth be used for all the various terms used in the member states taking part in the project.

In their conclusions from the 2006 IGLU Study, the authors refer to the educational success of the pre-school (cf. Valtin et al. 2007, pp. 342f.). Already in the 2001 IGLU Study, it was shown that children who attended pre-school performed better in mathematics, sciences and spelling. In the 2006 IGLU Study, this finding was also confirmed for reading and learning to write. (Rohlf & Harring, p. 133)

The equalising role of the pre-school is also proven. Preschool also has the task of providing

“...special attention and support for children who grow up in families with little or different cultural and social resources” (Liegler, 2003, p. 120) .

The knowledge gained in recent years of brain research and development psychology shows the importance of the early stages of childhood and adolescent maturity stages. In order to develop the highly complex connections in the brain, we now know that children have to gain the largest quantity and variety of experiences. They need a wide range of stimulating opportunities and challenges that activate their emotional centres. Taking into account

...the steadily decreasing number of children who grow up in our country, unfortunately, far too many children are unable to develop their potentials to the extent that would be possible under more favourable conditions. Too many children and young people lose their desire to learn, discover and create all too early. They only develop a very limited ability to form relationships and only obtain inadequate skills. It is therefore less a matter of teaching children increasing amounts of knowledge more and more quickly, assisted by support programmes. What we need are programmes, which prevent what still happens all too often, namely that children lose the desire to learn at some stage and cannot be bothered with school. (Hüther, 2010)

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

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

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

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

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

Bibliography

(2010).

URL <http://www.unicef.at>

Habermas, J. (2006). *Die neue Unübersichtlichkeit*. Frankfurt/Main.

Hollerer, L. (2005). *Schultütenkinder. Herausforderung am Übergang Kindergarten: Schule*. Graz.

Hüther, G. (2008). Damit die lust am entdecken und gestalten nicht verkümmert.... Artikel für die Zeitschrift „Grundschule“ (Dietlinde Heckt) Artikel für die Zeitschrift „Grundschule“ (Dietlinde Heckt) Artikel für die Zeitschrift „Grundschule“ (Dietlinde Heckt) Artikel für die Zeitschrift „Grundschule“ (Dietlinde Heckt).

URL http://www.nelecom.de/pdf/huether_damit_die_lust_am_entdecken_und_gestalten_nicht_verkuemmert.pdf

Hüther, G. (2010). Atmosphäre schaffen für entwicklung. erkenntnisse und konsequenzen aus der hirn-forschung.

URL <http://www.existenzanalyse.co.at/TEXTE/erkenntnishirn.html>

Kahlert, H. (2008). Bildung und erziehung im übergang zur wissensgesellschaft. In H. Willems (Ed.) *Lehr(er)buch Soziologie*, 2. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.

Liegle, L. (2003). Der bildungsauftrag des kindergartens. In H.-U. Otto, & T. Rauschenbach (Eds.) *Die andere Seite der Bildung. Zum Verhältnis von formellen und informellen Bildungsprozessen*. Wiesbaden.

Natorp, P. (1923). *Allgemeine Pädagogik in Leitsätzen zu akademischen Vorlesungen*. Marburg.

Nohl, H. (1949). *Pädagogik aus dreißig Jahren*. Frankfurt.

Pramling Samuelsson, I., & Carlsson, M. A. (2007). *Spielend lernen. Stärkung lernmethodischer Kompetenzen*. Troisdorf.

Rohlf, C., & Harring, M. (????). *Kompetenz- Bildung. Soziale, emotionale und kommunikative Kompetenzen von Kindern und Jugendlichen*. Wiesbaden.