



Enhancing Transition Practices
in Early Childhood Education

TRANSITION PRACTICES

CONCEPTUALIZATION OF TRANSITION

Report based on the analysis of existing literature and documentation. The report provides transnational picture of transition.



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Introduction

In the contemporary society, education is one of the predictors of an individual's well-being, opportunities for self-realisation and employability, an imperative of financial well-being that correlates with the satisfaction with life and social inclusion / SES. The accelerated technological development defines education as a continuous, lifelong process and as the development of personal learning strategies, which does not diminish the significance of formal education.

The formal education system of a country, structure of the compulsory level of education and expected outcomes are determined by the public education policy. At the European level, there are various formal education systems, approaches to the educational process and methods of involving an individual in certain education levels (Start Strong II, 2006). Through the legislative framework, the public educational policy determines the age of the child and understanding of the psychophysical status in the inclusion in the formal education system (primary school and/or preparatory levels) in the range from the normatively defined expected achievements to the recognition of the development status of the individual. A distinction can be made between the approaches that stimulate cognitive achievements and “measurable” outcomes from the social pedagogy approach focused on the understanding of the individual and relationships between the participants in a process in an authentic environment. Furthermore, there are “top-down” approaches from the point of view and expectations of adults, and “bottom-up” approaches that involve the child's experience and understanding of the process (Babić, 2014).

A number of recent studies indicate a link between the quality of the inclusion of children in the compulsory formal education process, and the initial and long-term (school and academic) achievements (Einarsdottir, Perry and Dockett, 2008; Esping-Andersen, 2009; OECD, 2010; Rous, Hallam, McCormick and Cox, 2010). This demonstrates the significance of the transition, the understanding of the role and responsibilities of all participants in the process as well as the necessity of cooperative relationships.

The transition can be interpreted as a process in period from the first information about a new education community to routine attendance (Dockett and



Perry, 2001). It involves the transition from the family to the kindergarten and from the kindergarten to school, including “horizontal transitions”, when the child is transferred from one educational institution to another at the same level (Babić, 2014). It involves changes in the individual’s identity, changes in the relationships between children and between children and adults (educators, teachers, parents), changes in the structure of the routine, learning strategies and expected learning outcomes (Ahtola et al., 2016; Ahtola et al., 2011).

The transition can be interpreted as a developmental fact, an opportunity for new achievements or a (potentially) stressful situation. As a rule, a lack of information is correlated with insecurity and stress. Simultaneously, being informed is the lowest, basic level of the transition. Quality transition procedures promote an active and affirmative involvement of all direct participants in the transition (the children, families, experts) and the social environment. New learning strategies are advocated: learning through play, free selection of learning content and sources, time and activity management, inquiry and experiential learning, and competence approach (functional knowledge, skills and affirmative attitudes).

In the transition process practice, there is a distinction between approaches oriented “toward” children and “with” children, and equal and active participation of children in their own education.

Public education policies normally determine the structure of the transition as an operative level of the inclusion of children in the formal education process. The methods, involvement of children, obligations of the participants in the process, and expected outcomes are all predetermined. The ‘readiness of the child for school’ is usually expected as a normative standard of physical, cognitive and socio-emotional development that enables children to respond to the curricular requirements (Bingham and Whitebread, 2012). Such an attitude promotes a scholarisation of the educational process in the kindergarten (Armstrong, 2008), and may lead to obtrusive teaching. The focus on the acquisition of normative knowledge instead of on active, experiential and inquiry learning may lead to a neglect of the socio-emotional well-being of children. Katz (2010) believes that, in the long term, this can reduce motivation and the ability of self-organised learning and initiate resistance in children, particularly boys, toward learning. The anxiety, stress and behavioural problems simultaneously increase (Bijedić and Bouillet, 2007; Featherstone, 2004).



The quality of the educational transition practice is likely largely determined by the personal pedagogical paradigms of the participants in the process in addition to public education policies. The personal paradigms stem from the values, attitudes and prior experience of an individual, the culture of the community and the wider social environment (Visković, 2018). This points to the significance of the formal education of teachers, continuous professional training and professional development. The relevant research of the existing practice indicates a prevalence of the least effective transition processes (Ahtola et al., 2011). This can be explained by resistance to change and tendency to conform to the existing practice (Kane, 2015). The quality of the transition is also worsened by an unfavourable socio-economic status / SES of the family in the sense of an unavailability of individual sources of learning, social deprivation and the (low) quality of parenting (Braš Roth, Markočić Dekanić, Markuš and Gregurović, 2010; Pastuović, 2012; Šućur, 2011). At the same time, it is those children that benefit the most from being involved in organised transition processes (Barnett and Ackerman, 2006; Loeb, Fuller, Kagan and Carrol, 2004).

The aforementioned findings of the relevant research in the world indicate the need for a systematic research of the transition process, understanding of the personal perspectives of all participants in the process, and acceptance of children as active participants in their own education. The development of modern technologies determines new learning strategies that result in functional knowledge and generate new ideas and research. The social processes indicate the need for develop socio-emotional and civic competences recognisable as predictors of the current and long-term well-being of the individual.

This publication within the framework of the Erasmus+ project *Transition practices in the early childhood* (2018-1-HR01-KA201-047432) provides an overview of the public education policies and the existing educational practice in European countries: Croatia, Iceland, Ireland, Poland and Sweden. The relevant scientific and professional publications are listed as the reference framework of further research.

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The Transition from Preschool to Primary School

Documentation from Croatia

1. Overview of the early childhood education system

Early Childhood Education/ECE in the Republic of Croatia is set up as part of (non) formal education system, although in the 1990s there was a tendency of merging it with the social welfare system. *Preschool Education Act* (1997, 2007, 2013) governs the manner in which kindergartens are founded and organized. It defines powers and duties of kindergartens, founders and management. The Act determines the following possible programmes: nursery (for children up to the age of 3) and kindergarten (regular programmes, preschool programme, programmes for special needs children, programmes for national minorities children / *Education in Language and Script of National Minorities Act*, 2000). Ministry of Education oversees the quality of educational programme implementation and proposes public education policies to the Croatian *Parliament*. ECE healthcare care and care fall within the competence of the Ministry of Health, and social measures fall in the domain of social welfare. ECE financing is left to the founders: local government, religious communities (*Legal Position of Religious Communities Act*, 2002), legal or natural persons, which sometimes leads to inequalities of legal determinants and practices. Authorized services have the power of oversight: School Inspection (*Educational Inspection Act*, 2011, 2012) and *Education and Teacher Training Agency* (*Professional Pedagogic Oversight Act*, 1997), which also has a duty to train education professionals.

The way children are included in ECE, types of programmes, number of children in educational groups, ratio of professional and auxiliary staff, spatial and material, health and financial conditions are determined by the *State Pedagogy Standard of Preschool Education* (2008, 2010). Children can be included in ECE after they turn 6 months, but this is rarely organized as the ratio of children and employees is not financially feasible. Children who turn 1 before the start of the school year (1 September) are usually enrolled in nursery school. According to available data, ECE included 139,228 children, most of whom (79.93%) attended local government kindergartens, with 2.68% attending religious community kindergartens.



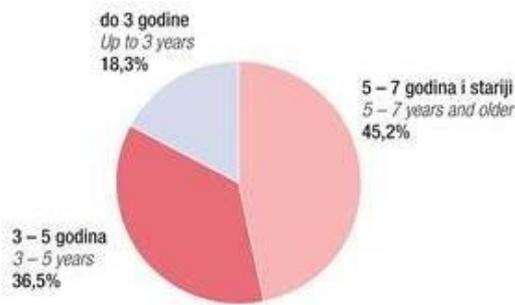
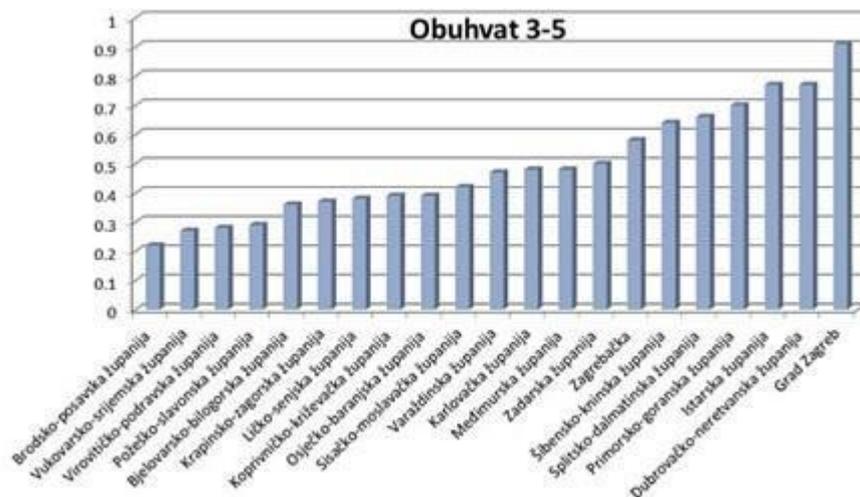


Chart 1: Children covered by preschool education programmes, by age groups, beginning of 2017/2018 school year (Croatian Bureau of Statistics / CBS, 2018)

There is no accurate data about children covered by ECE in relation to the population. It is estimated that ECE system includes approximately 60% of children aged 3 to 5. As ECE is financed by the local government, there are considerable differences in coverage between the counties (Chart 2). Preschool programme is mandatory, and it is reasonable to assume that all children are included in ECE, in some form, the year before starting primary school.



Graf 2.: Children covered by preschool education programmes, by counties/ regions (Centre for Peace Studies, CPS)

2. Summary of National early childhood education curriculum guidelines

The fundamental ECE guidelines (starting points, values, standards, expected outcomes and welfare of children) are indicated in the *National Curriculum of Early Childhood Education and Care/NCECE (2014)*. NCECE is conceived as a reference framework for the development

of an authentic curriculum for individual kindergartens. Curriculum development should be co-constructed by all participants in the process. The acceptance of children as active stakeholders in personal development, upbringing and education is advocated, as is the cooperative relationship between parents and educators, which is directed toward developing a partnership. Practice is, possibly, most related to personal paradigms of individuals and the usual (rigid) practice that is averse to change.

The public education policy of the Republic of Croatia assumes mandatory coverage of all children the year before they start primary school (formal education). *Preschool programme* that lasts 250 hours over the span of eight months is organized for children who do not attend regular programmes (*Guidance on the Content and Duration of the Preschool Programme, 2014*). Children who turn six¹ by April 1st start primary school that year (*Primary and High School Education Act, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2017, 2018*), with mandatory normative assessment of their psychophysical status : physical, cognitive, social and emotional (*Guidance on the Procedure for Determining the Psychophysical Status of the Child, Student and the Expert Comissions, 2014*). Professional associates in primary school, most often psychologists, assess the status of the child prior to enrolment in primary school. Enrolment in primary school may be differed, based on the assessment of the expert committee. The humanistic approach to inclusion of children whose developmental status is below average calls into question the need for normative assessments.

Preschool is expected to stimulate development of a child, alleviate fear of unknown, strengthen social competences of children and develop learning strategies, and documenting individual development of the child (development maps / individual portfolio) is recommended. Although taking over individual documentation of children would be highly justified, primary schools usually do not do this. Planned conversations with parents happen only sporadically, most often when development deviations are noted. Failure to recognize the developmental history of the child and assessing status of the child outside of their primary social environment does not contribute to comprehensive insight into their status. At the same time, assessment of children emphasizes the line between kindergarten and primary school.

Legislative determinants make early enrolment of younger children (which is justified



by one's aptitude) and deferred enrolment (due to assessed development delays) possible. In practice, early enrolment in primary school is usually initiated by parents.

3. Transition ideologies and practices stated in policy documents

Practice of preschool programmes in Croatia is predominantly adapted to the requirements of primary school. The concept of *school readiness* is conducive to schoolification of educational practices in kindergartens. The model of orientation on formative achievements (task completion according to workbook template) is often supported by parents. Insufficiently informed, parents require educators to provide them with "visible" and measurable "progress" report: graphomotor skills, initial reading and writing and basic mathematical knowledge. Primary school requirements are often imperative for parents, educators and children.

Normative assessment of the child's psycho-physical status often does not take into account the personality of the child or the context of growing up. Each deviation from the normative assessment is usually interpreted as a potential problem. Play, as natural form of children's learning is replaced by instruction, with workbooks often being fundamental work tools. Contextual conditions are often not considered, and development is not monitored, only outcomes are assessed. Formal teaching and focus on cognitive achievements often result in good "test" outcomes for children, which gives these children a starting advantage (teacher's positive image of children).

Curricular reform was initiated in 2015. The expert task group for ECE proposed that normative assessment be abandoned, monitoring become mandatory, as well as documenting individual development of children, and active or equal participation of children and parents (*Amendments to the National Curriculum for Early and Preschool Education*, 2016). Political changes also brought changes to the concept of reform.

4. Existing research on transitions in early childhood education

Scientific papers:

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Professional papers

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<https://www.azoo.hr/images/strucni2015/Nacionalni-kurikulum-za-rani-i-predskolski-odgoji-obrazovanje.pdf>

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Legal Position of Religious Communities Act. *Official Gazette*, 83/02. Preschool Education Act. *Official Gazette*, 10/97, 107/07, 94/13.

Professional Pedagogic Oversight Act. *Official Gazette*, 73/97.

State Pedagogy Standard of Preschool Education. *Official Gazette*, 63/08 and 90/10



The Transition from Preschool to Primary School

Documentation from Ireland

1. Overview of the early childhood education system in your country

Ireland is a country, whereby, the provision of quality in Early Childhood Education and Care has become a key priority for policymakers and stakeholders in recent years. The ECEC sector in Ireland has experienced increased and fast growth over the last three decades as recently as the early 1990's, care of young children was mainly unregulated and happened privately within the extended family. Many women primarily stayed at home until their children entered primary school and the need for early childhood education and care was not seen as a priority. However, as women in Ireland started to enter the workforce in more significant numbers, the area of childcare began to enter the national and policy agenda. The main policy focus at this stage was on providing places for children in childcare settings for families with two working parents, but, also to address disadvantage in early childhood — this increased funding was for more childcare places. However, with increased places, inconsistency in quality began to emerge. It is also interesting to note that at this point, there was little to no focus on the interconnected nature of care and education. In 1997 pre-school regulation was introduced, this point is recognised as the beginning of government policy around dealing with the quality of childcare settings. Over the past ten years, Ireland has experienced a further significant period of transformation and development. This includes the introduction of minimum qualifications for people working in ECEC settings, along with national policy and inspection frameworks. These are just some of the measures that been introduced to support the professionalisation of the sector and to enhance quality provision.

2. Summary of National early childhood education curriculum guidelines

In 2009 *Aistear* the curriculum framework for children from birth to six years was introduced in Ireland (NCCA, 2009). *Aistear* serves as a framework that can guide both curriculum development and the quality of service provision. *Aistear* is the Irish word for 'journey,' in recognition of the individual journey each child undertakes in their learning.



Aistear supports the child's holistic sense of wellbeing, identity, and belonging. It is a well-researched, evidence-based framework that can make a major contribution to the development of ECEC in Ireland. The framework highlights the critical importance of the first few years of a child's journey and the need for children to have rich and varied experiences from which they can learn and develop. The framework also highlights the significant role adults play in nurturing and extending this learning and development. Aistear supports the idea of encounter and emergence; it is the basis for educators to grow their curriculum.

Síolta, The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care (CECDE, 2006) was introduced in 2006. It was introduced because of an increased focus on quality and the recognised need to embed policy frameworks in early childhood education and care. This framework was informed by a growing research base and an understanding of how care and education are inextricable. The principles of *Síolta* provide a framework for quality and represent a change in thinking, particularly about the image of the children as capable and competent, children's rights and the importance of play. The introduction of the new Early Years Education Inspectorate (EYEI) at the Department of Education and skills took place in 2015.

3. Transition ideologies and practices stated in policy documents

"Ensuring continuity of experiences for children requires policies, procedures and practice that promote sensitive management of transitions, consistency in key relationships, liaison within and between settings, the keeping and transfer of relevant information (with parental consent), and the close involvement of parents and, where appropriate, relevant professionals." (*Síolta*, CECDE, 2006)

Both Aistear and *Síolta* support children's learning and development across a range of settings for children under six years of age and, are underpinned by a view of the child as active in their own learning, it also locates the child within the context of family and community. Aistear highlights the importance of transitions and engaging families – responsive and reciprocal relationships are key. Partnerships are key. Educators need to be active observers of children's experiences, dynamic communicators with families in the everyday, active change agents sharing their experiences of change. The *Síolta* principles of Quality represent



the vision, which informs and provides a context for quality practice in Early Childhood Education and Care in Ireland (CECDE, 2006). Síolta comprises of twelve principles and sixteen Síolta standards, one of which Standard 13; is Transitions. The inspection process and inspectors can support the process of transitions. The Department of Education and Skills supports best practice through an emphasis on the importance of the transition process. At inspection visits, the inspector is positioned to observe practice in settings and schools and advise practitioner and teachers by reporting on standards. The DCYA launched Better Outcomes Better Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020 (DCYA, 2014). Following on from this in 2018, First 5 was launched, a whole-of-government strategy to improve the lives of babies, young children, and their families. The policy will significantly enhance early childhood and make a considerable contribution to the lives of young children and society. A focus on an effective early childhood system will support the transition to school by enabling greater communication between ELC settings, primary schools, and parents, particularly for children with additional needs.

4. Existing research on transitions on early childhood education in Ireland

Within the Irish context, the first formal research on the transition from preschool to primary school was carried out by O’Kane (2007), with a project called “Building Bridges: The Transition from Preschool to School for Children in Ireland.” This project was underpinned by a theoretical basis including the ecological systems model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1992), complex interactions between the child, the family, preschool and primary school staff, along with each of their expectations of this process. The child’s transition to school was seen in terms of the influence of contexts and the connections between these contexts over time. A small-scale study of children in rural Ireland pointed to some difficulties in adapting to fewer play opportunities over the transition (McGettigan and Gray, 2012). Since then there has been further research lead by The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) with the publication of Early Childhood Transitions Research series (2016). The NCCA’s innovative research project on the transition from early years to primary school developed materials to enable practitioners, teachers, and parents to exchange information, involve children in their



transitions, and ensure that transitions were a positive learning experience. A recent in-depth mixed methods study (Ring et al., 2016) provided insights into perceptions of school readiness among early years educators and primary school teachers. Growing up in Ireland (GUI, 2018) study provides new information on children's experiences adjusting to primary education and the dispositions and skills they bring with them to the school setting.

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Project No. 2018-1-HR01-KA201-047432

The Transition from Preschool to Primary School

Documentation from Iceland

1. Overview of the early childhood education system in Iceland

The beginning of early childhood education in Iceland can be traced back to the 1920s, when the Women's Alliance in Reykjavík opened the first full-time day-care centre for poor children. In the 1940s, the first playschools opened, a part-time centres open to all children. In 1973 the Ministry of Education took over and integrated both programmes.

Since 1991, the concept playschool has been used for all early educational programmes in Iceland and since 1994, preschools have been the first level of schooling in Iceland. Icelandic children start formal compulsory schooling in the autumn of the year they turn six years old. Most children in Iceland start their preschool education around the age of two years.

The number of children attending preschools in Iceland has been increasing over recent years. At the end of 2016 around 85% of all children from one to five years old attended preschool. 12,5% of all preschool children in Iceland were of foreign nationality in 2016, a percentage that is also rising very fast (Statistics Iceland, 2017). According to the OECD (2017), preschool children in Iceland have the longest preschool day compared to children in other OECD countries. However, there is a lack of educated preschool teachers working in preschools in Iceland. According to the law (Lög um leikskóla nr. 90/2008), at least two-thirds of all staff members in each preschool should be educated as preschool teachers. Nevertheless, the reality is that at the end of 2016, only 31,9% of those who worked in preschools had been educated as preschool teachers; 13% had another university degree related to preschool teacher education, such as primary school teacher education or social education (Statistics Iceland, 2017).

2. Summary of national early childhood education curriculum guidelines

The current National Curriculum Guide was published in 2011, with the main part and the main ideology common for all school levels in Iceland, besides education at the university level. The Curriculum Guide is based on Preschool Act No. 90/2008 (Lög um leikskóla nr.



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90/2008). There are six fundamental pillars that should underlie education at all three levels. These are literacy, sustainability, health and welfare, democracy and human rights, equality and creativity (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2011).

The National Curriculum Guide for preschools describes the role of education, upbringing and caring of the preschool. In the Curriculum, a great emphasis is put on developing and supporting children's social skills. This is done by putting the value of play in front and the importance of democracy and equality in all school activities. It is highlighted that children learn through play and by participating in the preschool community. Preschool teachers and other personnel should ensure that every child is respected according to merit and that the learning environment is organised in such a way that children can enjoy their childhood.

The Curriculum lays down guidelines for preschool activities and discusses the learning areas of the preschool. Icelandic preschools may choose different ways to achieve the same goals and each preschool uses its own working methods and devises its school curriculum guide and operation plan.

3. Transition ideologies and practices stated in policy documents

The National Curriculum Guidelines for preschools and primary schools stress that children's education should be a continuous progression and a cooperative effort of children, parents and teachers. The knowledge and tasks that children were engaged in at preschool should be the basis for their primary school education, at the same time as they get an opportunity to tackle new challenging tasks and gain new experience. Preschool children should get an opportunity to get acquainted with the environment and activities of the compulsory school while they are still at preschool and continue good relations with their preschool after they have commenced their compulsory study. Teachers at both levels must be familiar with the education and work methods of each other in order to create a continuity in children's education.

Information about children, necessary for their welfare and development is to follow them to compulsory school in order to ensure that their primary school education is based in their experience and education at preschool.



4. Existing research on transitions in early childhood education in Iceland.

Transition has been studied from the perspectives of children, parents and teachers, in Iceland. Transition has also been studied in relation to different subject areas, such as literacy, outdoor learning and mathematic.

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The Transition from Preschool to Primary School

Documentation from Poland

1. Overview of the early childhood education system in Poland

Early education in Poland is the time from 0 to 9 years of age. The education system in this age range is incoherent. The stage from 0-3 years is when children can attend nurseries or children's clubs and when, as a part of care, caring, educational and pedagogical functions are implemented (Act 4th Feb 2011). However, it is not a part of the education system, and it is subject to the Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Policy (MFSP). Attending a nursery is optional, and the number of places in existing facilities is insufficient.

The education system subject to the Ministry of National Education (MEN) starts from 3 years of age. Children aged 3-6 years can attend a preschool, preschool class in a primary school preschool unit or a preschool center. Each 3-, 4-, 5-old is entitled to a place in a kindergarten. Compulsory education begins at the age of 6, one year before starting school. Primary education is divided into two parts. The beginning of school education in grades I-III is the end of early school education in the education system in Poland.

2. Summary of National early childhood education curriculum guidelines

In the nursery, there is no core curriculum and government policy documents only specify what program content should be included in the education of teachers working in nurseries and you can find there a fragment that concerns *adaptation as a result of development* (Regulation of the MFSP 25th March 2011). That in turn shows a completely different approach to thinking about the transition as an adaptation “to” also visible in subsequent documents.

The aim of pre-school education and education in grades I-III is to support the overall development of the child (MEN 2017, Core Curriculum 2017 p.5, 18). *In kindergarten, this support is carried out through the process of care, upbringing and teaching - learning, which enables the child to discover its own abilities, significance of doing things and to gather experiences on the path leading to truth, goodness and beauty. As a result of such support, the*



*child reaches the level of maturity allowing him/her to start learning at the first stage of education (MEN 2017, Core Curriculum p.5). In grades I-III, the school respects the subjectivity of the pupil in the process of building individual knowledge and transitioning from childhood to adolescence. As a result of such support, the child reaches maturity to begin learning at the second stage of education (MEN 2017, Core Curriculum, p. 18). The core curriculum includes the tasks of kindergarten and school (grades I-III), which are educational purposes; the child's achievements at the end of pre-school education, which in grades I-III become teaching content - a detailed list of skills that a child should possess at the end of a given educational stage; conditions and methods of implementation. A special place in it is occupied by the pre-school diagnosis, which teachers of 5-year-olds and 6-year-olds are supposed to establish. The purpose of the diagnosis is to *collect information for the parents to help them learn about their child's readiness to study at a primary school so that they can help them achieve this readiness according to their needs.* The results of such pre-school diagnosis kindergarten from are issued to parents in writing, and the parents decide whether they will pass it to the school they chose or not (<https://www.gov.pl/12/02/2019>).*

3. Transition ideologies and practices stated in policy documents

In early childhood education system in Poland and in government policy documents there is no description of ideologies and practices related to transitions. Preschool teachers develop their own pre-school adjustment programs in every preschool setting. The techniques of establishing the pre-school diagnosis raise doubts (Lewandowska, 2013).

4. Existing research on transitions in early childhood education in Poland

In Poland transitions to preschool is described mainly as a process of social adjustment to the outside-family environment. Main research: Grazyna Sochaczewska (1986), Jadwiga Lubowiecka (2000). Transitions to school has traditionally been described and is in terms of school maturity, school readiness „readiness of school“ or adjustment/adaptation of the child to school or preparation for school. A common element of all these references is the concentration on the individual child and whether it has achieved an important point in development, which is about readiness. Main research: Alina Szeminska (1969),



Barbara Wilgocka – Okoń (1972, 2003), Dorota Klus-Stańska (2004).

In recent years, as part of the research project “Dziecko sześćioletnie u progu nauki szkolnej”, Aldony Kopik [2007] conducted a nationwide research in the diagnosis of 6-year-old children’s development covering all spheres of their development, including social and emotional development. In support of the development of key competences for children at the school of 5-7-year-olds in the context of supporting their school readiness, attention was drawn to Anna I. Brzezińska, Joanna Matejczuk and Anna Nowotnik [2012].

There is only few research projects according to transition ideologies - on transitions in early childhood education: to preschool settings and kindergarten: Anna Kienig (1999, 2001, 2002, 2005, 2007, 2008) and to school: Anna Kienig (2009, 2010, 2012, 2013, 2017).

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The Transition from Preschool to Primary School

Documentation from Sweden

1. Overview of the early childhood education system

The early childhood education system in Sweden builds on the idea that all children have the right to safe preschools of high quality from age one to age five. Children from six years of age are enrolled in the preschool class. Most municipalities organise preschool class together with primary school and school age educare. The municipalities are responsible for ensuring preschools for all children aged one to five years and that children are offered a preschool place within 4 months after their parents have applied. Swedish preschool is affordable for everyone, as all municipalities use a system with a maximum fee. From 3 years, part time (15 hours weekly) is free of charge. In addition, children whose parents are unemployed or on parental leave have the right to a preschool place for at least 3 hours a day, or 15 hours a week. Preschools are open 10 – 12 hours weekdays. The Education Act governs all education, and all preschools and schools, both municipal and independent, are required to follow the Education Act and the Swedish national curricula (The National Agency for Education, 2018a, 2018b). The preschool class is governed by the Curriculum for the compulsory school, preschool class and school-age educare (The National Agency for Education, 2018b). The curricula are established by the Swedish parliament and revised by the government.

2. Summary of National early childhood education curriculum guidelines – The Swedish national preschool curriculum

The Swedish national curriculum has just been revised, official from 2019-07-01 (National Agency for Education, 2018a). Initially, the curriculum states the foundational democratic values: the inviolability of individual freedom and integrity, the equal value of all people, equity between genders, and solidarity with the weak are values to be promoted in everyday learning. Democracy is a foundation for all activities in the Swedish preschools. These educational principles are built into a holistic approach where play, development, learning and care are integrated (the educare model). In the



curriculum, children are described as individuals with competencies and as active beings with experience, interests, knowledge and skills. Children are to be given the opportunity to develop an understanding of democracy, to take part in decision-making and to take responsibility for their own actions and for the environment. Both teachers and children are given the task to participate in sustainable development. The rationale is based on the UN convention on the rights of the child and the idea of children's participation – their ability to be and to become an active democratic citizen in their own right (The National Agency for Education 2018a). The overall task is to promote learning and development within a secure and caring framework. The education shall be enjoyable, secure and rich in learning and promote lifelong learning.

Curriculum for the compulsory school, preschool class and school-age educare

The national school system is based on the same fundamental democratic values on which Swedish society is based on, as are the preschools; the inviolability of human life, individual freedom and integrity, the equal value of all people, equality between women and men, and solidarity between people and the respect for the environment. Additionally, it states: In accordance with the ethics of the Christian tradition and Western humanism, fostering a sense of justice, generosity, tolerance and responsibility in the individual.

Teaching in the preschool class and school-age educare program should promote the development and learning based on the pupils' needs and interests. The education shall develop a lifelong desire to learn and encourage all pupils to discover their own uniqueness and inspire them to make new discoveries and to acquire new knowledge. Other aspects are to develop fantasy, experiences and ability to learn, in co-operation with others, through play, movement and creation using aesthetic as well as explorative and practical working methods, try their own and others' ideas, solve problems and put these ideas into action. The preschool class and school-age educare program should also give opportunities for children to test their identity and views, familiarity with democratic principles, working methods and processes through participation, exercising influence and taking responsibility and to be able to participate in the life of society. The programme should take advantage of diversity and differences.



3. Transition ideologies and practices stated in policy documents

The preschool should collaborate with the preschool class, the school and school-age educare to support children's development and learning in a long-term perspective. Prior to transitions, preschool and the preschool class and school-age educare should exchange knowledge. This to create continuity and progression in children's development and learning. Also, collaboration aiming to prepare the children and their guardians before the transitions from preschool to school are required. Preschool teachers are responsible to pay special attention to children in need of special support in their development in this transition process. The preschool class program should work in order to ease children's transition from preschool into compulsory school and school-age educare as well as prepare them for continued education. The curriculum also stress the need for developing good peer relationships, a sense of belonging and security in the pupils' groups.

4. Existing research on transitions in early childhood education

Swedish research on transition have been developed in the last years (Ackesjö, 2010, 2014, 2017; Ackesjö & Persson, 2014, 2016; Kallberg, 2018; Largo, 2014; Sandberg, 2012). The Ackesjö and Persson (2016) study of weekly letters to parents about the preschool- class programs showed that preschool-class teachers construct both a social pedagogical position with an existence-oriented view on teaching and an academic position for preparing children for their subsequent school career. When the teachers describe teaching that proceeds from a social pedagogical position, they present a listening and flexible teacher and active children engaged in existence-oriented activities. Within these existence-oriented activities children are given the opportunity to question, collaborate and challenge at the same time as the teachers have to observe and respond to the children's opinions, questions and suggestions. Largo's (2014) research shows that transition between preschool class to school implies relational stress for children. Children need to get used to a change in the environment. In the transition work and in the way of talking about the future, it becomes important that teachers learn different ways of talking about the future of the school. The analyses also show that in the transition, different categories, including time, progress, pupils, age and place, were constructed. These categories were



also important in the construction of transition. The orientation of the transition was found to be constructed, and time was an important part of the meaning-making process in the transition. Sandberg (2012) emphasizes that transitions are about preparation from the old to the new and it could be important to create a good and safe social atmosphere and community. Ackesjö (2010) writes that one way to make the transitions soft can be to make preschool and preschool class as equal as possible, which means that the children can recognize themselves. One example is to use the preschool's pedagogy, to link the traditions. According to these researchers, relationships and recognizable pedagogy and environment are important factors for a safe transition between different type of schools (for example Preschool and preschool class). Kallberg (2018) studied social relationships and children's and adult's experience of the new cultural and social education settings from preschool class to school. It appears that the work on social relationships have a different appearance in the different school forms. The preschool class is described as socially oriented. In school the work on social relationships is gradually intertwined in the teaching context, foremost as classroom rules. Thus, collaboration between the two teaching professions and how the pedagogical content of the institutions and teacher roles are shaped seem to affect the way children are viewed. The way the teacher work with social relationships revealed different meaning between the different teaching professions.

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Appendix I. Transnational overview of ECEC

	Croatia	Iceland	Ireland	Poland	Sweden
ECEC system	Nursery (0-3) Kindergarden (3-6)	Playschool (1-6)	Early Learning & Care Setting (0-6)	Nursery of children's club (0-3) Preschool, preschool class, preschool unit or preschool center (3-6)	Preschool (1-5) Preschool class (6)
Attendance	Approx. 60% of children 3-5	Aproximately 85% of children 1-5	2017/2018 Results from 88% of ELC Settings 185,580 ch/n avail of one of the three Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) funded programmes: Early Childhood Care & Education (ECCE), Community Childcare Subvention (CCS, CCSPPlus and CCSU) and Training and Employment Childcare (TEC). Overall 2017/18 - 118,899 children benefited from ECCE children between 3-5 years old. 97% of eligible children avail of the scheme.		It is aprox 97% of the children who are six yeras old who goes in the preschool class It is aprox 83,8% of the children who are one to five years old who goes in the preschool
ECEC	Compulsory the year before starting primary school	First level of schooling Not compulsory		Compulsory at age of 6	From age of 3, part time (15 hours per week) is free of charge. Not mandatory



Primary school starts	Children who turn 6 by April 1st	Autumn the year turning 6		At age of 7	Autumn the year the children turn seven.
Curriculum guidelines	Social competences, learning strategies, documenting individual development	Social skills, learning through play, democracy, equality	Aistear or 'Journey': Wellbeing, identity, belonging. Siolta: competent child, children's right, importance of play	For preschools: care, upbringing, teaching. Reach level to start learning at the first stage of education. Readiness to study in primary school No curriculum for nursery	Democratic values (individual freedom and integrity, equal value of all people, equity between genders, and solidarity with the weak). Educare model (play, development, learning and care). Competent child, active beings with experience, interests, knowledge and skills.



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Appendix II. Transnational picture of transition in ECEC

Transition ideology in policy documens	<p>Preschools' focus on school readiness and schoolification is identified</p>	<p>Cooperation between children, parents and teachers. Teachers at both levels should be familiar with education of each other. Primary school education should build on preschool education and make continuity. Information follow children between school levels.</p>	<p>Importance of transition is highlighted. Engaging families. Information between school levels (with parental consent).</p>	<p>No description of transition ideology</p>	<p>Collaboration between preschool and the preschool class and the primary school, for development and learning. Exchange knowledge. Prepare children and their guardians for transition Pay attention to children in need of special support. Develop good peer relationships, a sense of belonging and security.</p>
Existing research on transition	<p>Few scientific and professional papers</p>	<p>Children's, parents' and teachers' perspective on transition have been studied. Also in relation to different subject areas.</p>	<p>The child, family, preschool and school and their expectation of the transition process. View of educators on school readiness. Children's experience of transition.</p>	<p>Focus on the school readiness of the child</p>	<p>The process of transition. Experience of parents and children. Focus on social relationships.</p>
Formal education of educators and teachers	<p>Compulsory Bachelor degree in ECEC Master Degree in ECEC as optional</p>	<p>Master degree, five years at University</p>	<p>Minimum requirement QQI Major Award Level 5. Higher capitation fee payable to ELC if preschool leader holds a BA Degree in ECE.</p>	<p>3 years university, Bachelor's degree specializing in Early Childhood Education</p>	<p>Bachelor's degree 3½ years university</p>

Formal education including education on transition	Currently there is no compulsory courses on transition. There is two optional courses (1 at University of Split & 1 at University of Zagreb – 4 ECTS each)	One course (10 ECTS) on transition	Currently, formal ECE courses have differing course content and structures. New Professional Award 2024 in development.		
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