

EARLY YEARS TRANSITION PROGRAMME

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)



Transition from pre-school to school:
Emphasizing early literacys—Comments
and reflections by researchers from eight
European countries

CHAPTER 3

Early literacy learning in the perspective of the child: Literacy Stories

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3.1 Abstract

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

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

In the **EASE** project, we will pay attention to children's participation and the process of building up knowledge in connection with language practices. It is a challenge for teachers in early childhood services, pre-school classes and primary school to create an environment that stimulates early literacy, an environment with rich opportunities for language practice of all kinds. We assume that children are competent and creative and generate meaning by talking, listening, communicating with the help

of pictures and texts/reading and writing. The learner's perspective is in focus. Marton & Booth (2000) find that the world is constituted as an internal relation between the learner and the world. Individuals experience the world in different ways, and this affects their behaviour in different situations. If you wish to understand how an individual handles a situation or a problem, you also have to understand how she/he experiences the situation or problem. Then, according to Runesson (2004), some of the conditions of learning that are connected with the development of certain capacities will become apparent.

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

Interaction	Expressions	Structures	Graphic Symbols	Interpretation
Communication	Vocabulary	Grammatical strategies	Drawing	Interest in reading
Attention	Narration	Awareness of language	Scribbling	Inference
Listening	Description	Phonological awareness	Letters	Logographic reading
Questions	Argumentation	Meta linguistic aspects	Writing	Orthographic reading

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

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

ability for *story-telling*; naming and *describing* objects and events; and arguing for an idea and attitude have to be borne in mind.

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

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

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

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

A child's use of **graphic symbols** may pose a problem; *scribbling* and *drawing* can be difficult to distinguish from one another and to discern. For most children, it may be natural to write before they learn to read. Experimenting with pen and paper to express something can be a way to develop a linguistic awareness, that is, an understanding of language, form and structure. By the concept EARLY CHILDHOOD LITERACY, we mean various creative ways of using the written language, corresponding to the two concepts "broader textual concept" and "multimodality". This fits in with the description by Hall (2003), who sees the child's early writing activity as a competent creation of meaning. What a child achieves on a certain occasion should be seen as an imprint in time of what the child understands at a specific point in time and in a specific context (Kress, 2000; 2003; Gee, 2002).

The above mentioned statement emphasises the fact that the teacher needs to have an open mind when involving children early in various literacy activities. To understand children's expressions of various writing and communication tools, we believe that the first step is to understand the child's intentions:

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

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

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

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

In pre-school there is an opportunity to develop children's interest in texts in everyday life associated with: toys, logos, signs, labels, games (PC, Nintendo, etc.), chat, TV and video, sports, music/songs, shared singing and reading (Eriksen Hagtvet, 2006; Fast, 2007; Gustafsson & Mellgren, 2002; Magnusson, 2008). The teacher's ability to interact in such an environment and with the pre-school child who has not yet developed any understanding of the alphabetical system varies. To set up the communicative function of written language as a learning object demands much of the teachers in pre-school, as it requires an insight that they themselves lost when they acquired the skill of handling written language as a communicative system. Adopting the perspective of the learner in this area is a great challenge, but it is precisely what is needed when assisting a small child to become a person who can read and write (Gustafsson & Mellgren, 2002). Learning to write and use letters and words are complex processes that take place in complex contexts. We have already abandoned our view of learning to write as a formal skill

that the child acquires through instruction and practice. The written language experienced by children is changing all the time; what applies to one generation does not apply in the same way to their children and grandchildren. This makes it difficult for the one who is guiding children in the world of the written word. You have to take the child as your starting-point—not your own childhood, but the child you are facing here and now (Gustafsson & Mellgren, 2005).

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

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

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

These results are consistent with the view of Vygotsky (1934/2007) that the external and internal functions of language, language and written language are the primary tools for learning. The external function is communicative, and the internal one is a tool for thinking. Written language has the same function as verbal language, but its external function is more concrete and observable. Its internal function is a tool for reflection and learning at a metacognitive level. The act of writing implies a distance

from the language/words as auditory icons, and the writer assumes the reader's perspective. Katherine Nelson and Lea Kessler Shaw (2002) studied how pre-school children use and create meaning in words, how word comprehension develops and how they learn to use words as symbols. In a linguistic culture that involves both children and adults, the interpretation of the adults in the child's immediate environment is often its message, from a context. In such a culture, a child can use words that he/she has not yet developed a general understanding of. In this way learning takes place in a social interaction where children are communicating with others—adults, siblings and/or colleagues—who understand the general meaning of words and concepts (Liberg, 1990; Bruner, 1996; Nelson & Kessler Shaw, 2002).

3.2 Interpretation

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

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

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

Reading is more than just reading books. In the issue of early literacy learning, it is important to give children varied experiences of reading. A child's first reading is usually a *logographic reading*—they read

wholes: logos/images/signs/name/word pictures. Different texts and messages are to be found everywhere in the environment: for commercial purposes; in traffic; in daily life in the surrounding community (Liberg, 2006).

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

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

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

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

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

3.4 Early Literacy Indicators

Early literacy indicators are for inspiring teachers to see and recognize early literacy in diverse events, not just common-sense reading or writing. Following the socio-cultural tone and the five linguistic aspects presented in this article, teachers and researchers alike need to be able to envision literacy events without being limited to the vocabulary of cognitive skill acquisition. The ability to spot and talk about literacy events in play, drawing, a wide range of peer interactions etc. enables us to create and maintain literacy friendly environments, without having to rely on the traditional, school oriented ways. This way we are well on the road to eventually promote conditions for meaningful literacy events. So the indicators have the potential to enrich pedagogical practices.

On the hand-out, the indicators are grouped into three main kinds of activities which have documented relations to the development of reading and writing skills: 1) storytelling and reading, 2) drawing, writing or scribbling and 3) playing. This is thought to provide some entrance points for observation and analysis, and should not be understood as a threefold, arbitrary logic for sorting the literacy stories into separate categories. Often, indicators from all three categories are applicable to the same early literacy story.

3.5 Context Indicators

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

3.6 Some notes on indicators: Playing with fire?

As already touched upon in the introductory chapter of this handbook, indicators are to be used with extreme caution. They are tools for enhancing vision, as well as blinders: Even though we try to understand early literacy in broad and holistic ways (and are striving to make the indicators reflect at least parts of the complex theoretical universe behind the presented five linguistic aspects), not every event in the early childhood setting should count as an early literacy event. This is the price we pay for a sharpened focus on early literacy—to focus on something is to some extent to blur the surroundings. But other aspects of ECEC, and not just early literacy, should of course remain in focus at other times. What we are saying is this: Introducing an (-other) early literacy-oriented method of documentation into an ECEC setting, where a plethora of different curriculum objectives and pedagogical traditions, norms and values is already built into the pedagogical framework, is a dangerous act. We need to make sure that these indicators, however broad and holistic, do not end up living a life of their own, being lifted out of the socio-cultural theoretical framework to be misplaced and misused in a modernistic discourse of quality and control through standards (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005). Stressing the importance of teachers being aware of and responding to the five linguistic aspects is by the same token not the same as advocating an early learning approach over a tradition inspired more by social pedagogy (OECD, 2001; 2006). The indicators should merely be seen as an inspiration when discussing what to look for when trying to conjure up early literacy in broad and holistic ways.

Indicators are already and always installed in the normative machine we call pedagogic practice. A bit of elaboration: To claim a practice of indicator-free early literacy teaching, is in fact to claim a practice of tacit or hidden indicators. Pedagogy is always about something, and is always inscribed in values and relations of power (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2007). Tacit literacy theory (Gee, 2008) generates tacit (and often common-sense) literacy indicators. Tacit conceptions of early literacy, and of how early literacy manifests itself as practices in early childhood settings, are in no way better than open and visible ones. Articulating a list of indicators means—at the very least—to put the inescapable normative aspect of this method out in the open, where it should be subject to being challenged and constantly reworked.

3.7 Summary of the indicator driven EASE-adaptation

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

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

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

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

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

It is lunchtime, and the children are seated while eating. Thomas has already finished his meal, and he wants to read a story aloud to his classmates. Thomas picks up a book from the 'book basket'. The book contains pictures and simple text, and it's a story he knows already. It's easy to see the excitement in Thomas' face: He is looking forward to sharing the action-packed tale of The Thief! Thomas starts to read aloud, but suddenly he becomes aware of the audience (his classmates), who have all turned towards him on their chairs while

quietly munching on their lunches. This sudden awareness of the audience clearly makes Thomas nervous, and he's having trouble focusing on decoding the text. But he won't give up. Thomas 'reads' the rest of the story using his prior knowledge of the story, his imagination and the pictures on the pages (which he from time to time pauses to show underway). In the end, it turns out to be a really exciting story, where Thomas, on the spot, narrates the 'truck', the 'loot', the 'house in need of fixing' and other elements of the story in a somewhat new way. His classmates obviously enjoy the story, and applaud at the end.

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

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

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

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

3.9 Conclusion

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

& Pramling Samuelsson, 2003). Gustafsson and Myrberg (2002) also claim that the competence of the teacher is the single most important factor contributing to pupils' results in school. What characterises the successful teacher is the use of a variety of teaching methods and high expectations of the children's learning.

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