

# Finnish Country Note on Transitions in ECEC

## Review of Policies and Practices for Transitions from Early Childhood Education and Care to Primary Education

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<p><b>Abstract</b></p> <p>In 2015–2016, the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture participated in an OECD project on transitions from early childhood education and care together with eight other countries (<i>the OECD Review of policies and Practices for Transitions from Early Childhood and Care to Primary Education</i>). The objective of this project was to examine the policies and practices of different countries for achieving high-quality transitions from early childhood education and care. For this purpose, the participating countries undertook to produce country notes on transitions by responding to themes and questions formulated by the OECD.</p> <p>Finland's country notes describe policy measures and the planning, organisation, steering and objectives of transitions as they were in spring 2016. The country review also describes the transitions from the perspective of professional, pedagogical and developmental continuity. It further provides a summary of the challenges associated with the transitions and the strategies deployed to overcome these challenges. The country report also brings up Finnish research and researchers focusing on transitions from recent years.</p> <p>Participation in the project and the production of the country review has widened the frame of reference for transitions from early childhood education and care to pre-primary education and further to school. Participation in the project produced a more comprehensive picture of Finland's national situation regarding transitions. Finnish research in transitions was also collated during the project, raising awareness of it and making it accessible at the national and international level.</p> <p>The OECD will publish its report titled <i>Starting Strong V Transitions</i>, which will be based on the participants' country notes, in summer 2017.</p>		
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<b>Tiivistelmä</b>	<p>Suomi osallistui opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriön toimesta kahdeksan muun maan kanssa OECD:n varhaiskasvatuksen siirtymiä koskeneeseen hankkeeseen vuosina 2015–2016 (<i>The OECD Review of Policies and Practices for Transitions from Early Childhood and Care to Primary Education</i>). Hankkeen tarkoituksena oli tarkastella eri maiden toimintalinjauksia ja käytäntöjä laadukkaiden siirtymien aikaansaamiseksi varhaiskasvatuksessa. Tätä tarkoitusta varten hankkeeseen osallistuneet maat sitoutuivat tuottamaan OECD:lle siirtymiä kuvaavat maaraportit vastauksina OECD:n esittämiin teemoihin ja kysymyksiin.</p> <p>Suomen maaraportti kuvaa vuoden 2016 kevään tilanteessa siirtymiin liittyviä politiikkatoimia, siirtymien suunnittelua, organisointia, ohjausta ja tavoitteita. Lisäksi maaraportissa kuvataan siirtymiä ammatillisen, pedagogisen ja kehityksellisen jatkuvuuden näkökulmista. Edelleen maaraportissa luodaan katsaus siirtymiin liittyviin haasteisiin ja strategioihin näiden haasteiden voittamiseksi. Maaraportti tuo esiin myös viime vuosien suomalaista siirtymätutkimusta ja tutkijoita.</p> <p>Hankkeeseen osallistuminen ja maaraportin tuottaminen on avannut siirtymiin liittyvää viitekehystä varhaiskasvatuksesta esiopetukseen ja edelleen kouluun entistä laaja-alaisemmin. Hankkeeseen osallistumisen kautta on saatu kokonaisvaltaisempi käsitys Suomen kansallisesta tilanteesta siirtymien osalta. Hankkeen myötä on myös koottu suomalaista siirtymiin liittyvää tutkimusta kansalliseen ja kansainväliseen tietoisuuteen ja käyttöön.</p> <p>OECD julkaisee hankkeeseen osallistuneiden maiden maaraporttien pohjalta laaditun Starting Strong V Transitions -raportin kesällä 2017.</p>	
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<b>Referat</b>	<p>Tillsammans med åtta andra länder deltog Finland genom undervisnings- och kulturministeriet i OECD:s projekt kring övergångar inom småbarnspedagogiken åren 2015–2016 (<i>The OECD Review of Policies and Practices for Transitions from Early Childhood and Care to Primary Education</i>). Projektet syftade till att granska olika länders verksamhetsriktlinjer och förfaranden för att säkerställa smidiga övergångar inom småbarnspedagogiken. För detta ändamål skulle de deltagande länderna producera landsrapporter som beskriver övergångarna och beaktar OECD:s teman och frågor.</p> <p>Finlands landsrapport beskriver situationen våren 2016 och behandlar politiska åtgärder, planering, organisering, styrning och mål i fråga om övergångarna. Därtill beskriver landsrapporten övergångarna med tanke på den yrkesmässiga, pedagogiska och utvecklingsmässiga kontinuiteten. Vidare ger landsrapporten en översikt över utmaningar kring övergångarna och strategier för att lösa dessa. Rapporten tar även upp de senaste årens finländska forskning kring övergångar.</p> <p>Genom att delta i projektet och producera landsrapporten har referensramen kring övergångar fått en allt större bredd, från småbarnspedagogiken till förskoleundervisningen och vidare till skolan. Projektet har bidragit till att ge en mer helgjuten bild av läget i Finland vad gäller övergångar. I och med projektet har man också sammanställt finländsk forskning kring övergångar och gett den nationell och internationell exponering.</p> <p>Sommaren 2017 publicerar OECD rapporten <i>Starting Strong V Transitions</i> som grundar sig på de deltagande ländernas landsrapporter.</p>		
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## INTRODUCTION

### The OECD's Transition Project

The OECD Review of policies and practices for transitions from early childhood to primary education (also to be referred to as the *Transitions Project, 2015–2016*) will provide analysis on effective policies and practices in ensuring successful transitions. An important part of the Project consists of collecting information on country approaches to improve the effectiveness of transitions between ECEC and primary schooling, how transition policies are organised and planned in countries and jurisdictions, common challenges in this, and strategies and lessons learned on facilitating transitions. There are important differences between countries with respect to the policies, approaches and practices in transitions. The Review intends to provide a stock-take of current policies and practices in countries or jurisdictions, analyse common challenges, and identify innovative and successful initiatives in overcoming these with the purpose to make transitions more effective in stimulating early child development.

The OECD Secretariat will collect information on country approaches to transitions through the preparation of Country Note (CNs), to enable countries and jurisdictions to set their approaches in proper context. The CNs respond to a common set of issues and questions, and use a common framework to facilitate comparative analysis and maximise the opportunities for countries to learn from each other. This is part of the effort to collect information from as many countries as possible, in ways that minimise the burden on countries and make it easy to share and add to the public knowledge base.

### Country Notes (CN) and Synthesis Report

Each participating country<sup>1</sup> is committed to compiling Country Notes based on the comparative framework given by the OECD. The CNs will provide an in-depth analysis of context, key factors and policy responses in individual countries. They provide an

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<sup>1</sup> Finland, Austria, Denmark, Japan, Kazakhstan, Norway, Slovenia, Sweden, Wales (UK).

invaluable source of information on policies to improve and strengthen transitions between ECEC and primary school and greatly facilitate the analysis to be developed within the Review.

The CN is intended for three main audiences:

- The Secretariat and participating countries as an aid to sharing experiences, and identifying common problems and policy options. It will also provide important background material for the final synthesis report;
- Those interested in transition policies and practices from ECEC to primary schooling within the country concerned – the CN can be an important means of focusing national attention on key issues that need to be addressed, and drawing attention to policy initiatives; and
- Those interested in transition policies and practices from ECEC to primary education at international level and in other countries – all CNs will form the basis for an international comparative analysis, to be published in the final synthesis report.

### **Finnish Country Note**

The Finnish objective of the Transition Project is to achieve comparative information from various countries. Another goal is to compile information and practices and this way form an overall view of the national situation of transitions, both in administration and research as well as in practical actions. The information produced in this project is valuable to Finland in this situation, where many changes are taking place in early childhood education and care with regards to legislation, curriculum work, evaluation and pedagogic development.

The Finnish Country Note describes the political actions, planning, organisation, guidance and goals of transitions (Chapter 1). In addition to this, the Country Note describes transitions from the viewpoints of professional, pedagogical and developmental continuance (Chapters 2–4). The Country Note also reviews the challenges related to transitions and the strategies to overcome these challenges. At the end of the Country Note are the source references as well as a compilation of the Finnish transition studies and researchers from recent years concerning transitions from ECEC to primary education and school education.

Counsellor of Education, Doctor of Education Kirsi Alila from the Ministry of Education and Culture, who is responsible for the OECD's ECEC work, was in charge of writing and

compiling the Finnish Country Note. Thank you for the following people for their valuable help, excellent cooperation and commitment to producing the contents of this report: Heli Nederström, Najat Ouakrim-Soivio and Tarja Kahiluoto from the Ministry of Education and Culture, Arja-Sisko Holappa, Petra Packalen, Kati Costiander, Kirsi Tarkka, Pia Kola-Torvinen and Elisa Helin from the Finnish National Board of Education, Tuija Turunen from the University of Lapland as well as Kristiina Kumpulainen and Saara Salmi from the University of Helsinki.

In addition to the CNs, Finland has produced Excel-based survey materials for the use of OECD in relation to the Transition Project as well as the compilation of Finnish transition studies presented at the end of this report.

# Chapter 1. The Transition System and its Organisation

The purpose of this chapter is to describe some of the main features of the transition system in Finland in terms of organisation, governance as well as performance.

## 1.1 Policy Context

### Key traditions and values and changes in them in transitions from ECEC to primary school

1. In Finland we have always valued the planning of the transition phases and flexibility for children and families. Our aim has been that the transition from ECEC to school, for example, shouldn't be too "big of a step." Concerning our values and the client approach that we have emphasised over recent years, we have been concentrating more on children's and parent's transitions, in addition to developing co-operation between staff and different services. We have become more aware of the vertical transitions.
2. In recent years, taking the children's view into account in matters concerning them has been increasing in Finland and the rest of the world. This stems from the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) as well as from highlighting the participation and inclusion of children in pedagogics and education (e.g. Lipponen, Kumpulainen & Hilppö 2013; Hilppö et al. 2013). The background for these notions is the view of a child as an active director and operator of their own life. (Strandell 2010; James & Prout 2008; Lipponen et al. 2013)
3. Children increasingly also produce knowledge and act as researchers themselves in research. This kind of research is research from the children's perspective, and visual, inclusive research methods are widely used in order to capture the children's perspective. (For example, Karlsson & Karimäki 2012)

4. In recent years, pedagogic operations based on strengths and opportunities have been emphasised more and more in early childhood education and schools. Research focused on well-being as well as the rise of positive psychology is behind this trend. (Kumpulainen et al. 2013; Uusitalo-Malmivaara & Vuorinen 2016) Educational transitions can also be inspected through the opportunities they offer instead of the possible problems and risk factors. For example, a school transition may offer a child an opportunity for growth and development and for reinforcing the child's own experience as an operator in their own life. (Hedegaard 2014)
5. Traditionally, children's different educational transitions have been inspected through learning environments and bridging the operational models, and from the perspective of adults. Modern research does not belittle the significance of this bridging, but it also highlights reinforcing the child's own competence during transitions. (E.g. Dunlop 2007, Salmi & Kumpulainen manuscript sent for evaluation in 2016)
6. In research of educational transitions, the study of formal, vertical transitions has been extensive. They have been inspected mainly from the viewpoints of a child's learning and adaptation, and when adult operators have attempted to develop policies that facilitate the school transitions. At the same time, less attention has been paid to horizontal transitions and children's subjective experiences of transitions. More and more often, however, we now study the children's experiences of subsequent formal transitions and daily transitions, and compare and reflect these experiences to existing practices, systems and societal discourses. (Pietarinen, Pyhältö & Soini 2010)
7. The concept of adapting to school is also reviewed more critically than before. (E.g. Linnilä 2006)
8. Concepts used in transitions have developed.
9. The preschool reform in 2000 has gradually changed the tradition of transition. Before this reform, transition from ECEC to primary school was the most important transition in early childhood. Since 2000 preschool education has increasingly become a transition year from ECEC to primary education. Since 2000 the traditions and values of preschool education have been re-negotiated between ECEC traditions and demands from basic education (Turunen & Rafferty, 2013). The most recent reform in legislation, where preschool education became mandatory for children (Act on Basic

Education 1 August 2015), will probably re-start these negotiations. The objective of making preschool education mandatory was to promote educational equality. Making preschool education mandatory was seen to support the children's transitioning from ECEC to basic education.

### **Occurred changes in political and/or societal attention to the topic of transitions in the last five or ten years nation- or state-wide reasons of the changes**

10. The Finnish National Board of Education published a transition position statement *Onnistunut koulun aloittaminen* ([http://www.edu.fi/download/151735\\_onnistunut\\_koulun\\_aloittaminen.pdf](http://www.edu.fi/download/151735_onnistunut_koulun_aloittaminen.pdf)) in 2011. This position statement is based on international research information and was an attempt to promote research-based practices in transition to school. The main reason for increased attention to transition to school is the research evidence of the importance of a successful transition to school (e.g. Dockett & Perry, 2013; Peters, 2014; Turunen, 2014).
11. In Finland we have become aware of the complexity/multifacetedness of transitions. The pedagogical meaning of transitions have been highlighted and emphasised. Transition has been included in our curriculums.
12. Research of transition has increased and become more versatile.

### **Changes and the reasons of changes in the organization or system of transitions over the last five or ten years at Finnish national level**

13. Pre-primary education, that is one year of education before compulsory education, has increased its function as a transition year between ECEC and primary education since 2000, and increasingly from 2015 onwards when it became mandatory for all 6-year-olds.
14. The aim of this change was educational equality and having all children (100 %) in pre-primary education, although 98 % of all 6-year-old children were already attending.
15. Transition has been included in our curricula (primary education, pre-primary education and to some extent in our "old" / current curriculum for ECEC (2003/2005)). The new curriculum for ECEC will be launched in October 2016.

## **Evolution of the transition policies over the last five or ten years. Three most important legal or implementation changes and reasons for them.**

16. On 29 August 2013, the government stipulated in its programme of structural policy that in order to improve the equal learning capabilities of children, pre-primary education is made mandatory when transitioning to basic education. The objective of this change of legislation concerning the obligation of pre-primary education is to improve children's learning prerequisites and thereby increase educational equality by including in pre-primary education those 2 per cent of preschool-aged children who have not participated in free-of-charge pre-primary education. This change highlighted the children's right to pre-primary education and the support measures that are important to learning and development.
17. The National Board of Education updated the core curriculum for pre-primary and basic education in 2014. According to the core curriculum of pre-primary education, the objective is that pre-primary education, early childhood education and care and basic education all form a consistent continuum that supports the child's growth and learning. Pre-primary education supports child's development and learning systematically, and also transitions from ECEC to pre-primary education and from pre-primary education to school should be systematic. Cooperation is developed and evaluated together under the leadership of the party organising the education.
18. The recent reform in legislation where pre-primary education became mandatory caused some local debates. Especially in Lapland, the long distances were discussed in the media.
19. The three most important changes:
  - Transition has been included in curricula
  - Pre-primary education for 6-year-old children (one year before primary school starts) since 2000. Pre-primary education has been obligatory since 1 August 2015. New core curriculum since 2014.
  - Since 1 August 2015 ECEC has been the right of the child, formerly parents were entitled to have a day care place for their child. The new curriculum for ECEC will be published in October 2016.

## **Current trends and debates regarding transitions**

20. In research, vertical and formal transitions have been studied more by reviewing the perspectives of adults or the practices concerning the transitions. The child has been studied from the perspectives of

development and adaptation. More recent research puts the child in the centre, as an information producer and researcher, and recognises that a child is a competent agent who has valuable experiences that can be utilised. Research focusing on well-being and strengths has also gained a foothold in pedagogic and educational research. Instead of reviewing risk factors, school transition can also be studied as an opportunity for growth, development and well-being. Inspecting horizontal transitions and experiences as individual processes and in relation to vertical transitions.

21. Current trends:
  - the smoothness and flexibility of the transitions => importance of planning
  - more discussion of the school readiness to receive children from ECEC and pre-primary education (not so much talk about children's school readiness anymore)
  - active consideration and developing of the transition activities
  - grasping the complexity of the transition, for example horizontal and vertical levels of the transitions
  - growth of the research on transitions (see attached Finnish research on the matter)

## 1.2 Goals and Purposes

### Goals and purposes of transitions from ECEC to primary school.

22. The "spirit" of our Act on Basic Education is to create a smooth path for children to school. The Act emphasises participation in pre-primary education the year before the beginning of primary school. In the curriculum of pre-primary education:
23. The national core curriculum for Pre-Primary Education 2014 (section 2.2) states: "It is important that early childhood education and care, pre-primary education that is part of it, and basic education form an entity that proceeds consistently in terms of the child's growth and learning. The starting point for a high-quality entity is that teachers and other personnel are familiar with the different phases of the learning path, the objectives central to these phases, and their characteristics and practices. In the interest of supporting the growth of children and their learning, transition phases are planned and evaluated together in the manner described in section 3.3. Teaching and other personnel work together with guardians in all phases of the children's learning path. The goal is that each child's learning path from early

childhood education and care to pre-primary education and further on to basic education is a flexible continuum founded on the needs of the child. Systematic leadership promoting competence and cooperation among personnel in pre-primary education units and on the level of the education provider has a significant role in this.”

24. The national core curriculum for Pre-Primary Education 2014 (section 3.3) describes Cooperation in transition phases: “The transitions from home or early childhood education and care previously attended by the child to pre-primary education, and from pre-primary education to school, are important phases of life for children. A successful transition promotes a sense of security and well-being in children and supports their prerequisites for growth and learning. The practices in transition phases must be systematic. It is important that local curricula and plans for early childhood education and care and pre-primary education have a consistent policy for practices related to transition phases. Practices are evaluated and developed in cooperation among personnel. Feedback from guardians is accounted for in the development.

The education provider creates practices for cooperation and transfer of information which enable the transition of children from home or early childhood education and care previously attended to pre-primary education and from there to basic education to occur as flexibly as possible and in a manner that supports the growth and learning of children. The goal is that information central to the organisation of instruction, learning support and pupil welfare will be passed on as the child transitions from one unit to another or from one level of education to the next. The currently valid provisions are adhered to in the transfer of information<sup>2</sup>. In the transition phases of pre-primary education or basic education and particularly when deciding upon an exception to the time of starting education, the expertise of the child's previous and future teachers regarding the progress of and support for the child's growth and learning is utilised.

When children move into pre-primary education and to school, the goals, task and working approaches of the type of education in which the child is about to start shall be discussed with the child and his or her guardian. The aim is that children and

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<sup>2</sup> Section 40–41 of the Basic Education Act (642/2010)

guardians have an opportunity to familiarise themselves with the learning environments, activities and personnel of pre-primary education and education in grades 1 and 2 prior to the beginning of instruction. Information on morning and afternoon activities of basic education shall be provided to children moving to basic education and to their guardians.”

25. The same national goals and principles are written in the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2014.
26. Transitioning to pre-primary education from home or previous ECEC or to school from pre-primary education are important life stages for children. A successful transitioning promotes children’s sense of security and well-being as well as their growth and learning capabilities. The practises of transition phases must be systematic. It is important that the plans concerning local ECEC and basic education have common guidelines about the practises related to transition phases. The practises are evaluated and developed through the personnel’s cooperation. The feedback from guardians is taken into account on this development.
27. Aims and practices of the transitions and also how transitions are evaluated are decided at the local level.
28. It is important to utilise the experiences and opinions of both the children and their guardians in developing the operational culture of pre-primary education. Cooperation with other professionals of ECEC, basic education, educational support and pupil welfare is essential in order to secure the children’s smooth learning path and well-being.
29. One part of the good transition is the practices concerning data transfer procedures. General instructions are on Acts and curricula. It is important that the knowledge about a child’s need for support and support received during pre-primary education is also transmitted to basic education. The educational organisers are responsible for creating and developing the practices for smooth information flow. The information essential to organising education is delivered immediately to another organiser of pre-primary or basic education, without being hindered by a secrecy clause.
30. In pre-primary education, the teaching and pedagogics should be organised in cooperation with the guardians so that all children receive teaching, guidance and support in accordance with their own

development level and needs. A child in extended compulsory education must participate in pre-primary education organised during the starting year of their compulsory education. Children in extended compulsory education have the right to start their pre-primary education at the age of 5. A child in extended compulsory education and a child who starts their basic education a year later than their peers have the right to receive pre-primary education also during the year their compulsory education begins.

31. A child has the right to start basic education one year in advance if the child has, based on psychological and, if necessary, medical reviews, the capabilities to succeed in his or her studies. The organiser of education may, based on the aforementioned reviews, grant the child permission to start basic education a year later than stipulated.

See: Onnistunut koulun aloittaminen position statement [http://www.edu.fi/download/151735\\_onnistunut\\_koulun\\_aloittaminen.pdf](http://www.edu.fi/download/151735_onnistunut_koulun_aloittaminen.pdf).

## Equity goals through transitions between ECEC and primary school

### Specific groups

32. There has been special attention on transitions regarding children with special needs or immigrant children. These practices are developed in local services.

### Settings/services in socio-economically disadvantaged areas.

33. This is decided and developed also at the local level. In Finland, some schools benefit from the grants of positive discrimination, the purpose of which is, for example, to increase educational equality. These grants are distributed based on the assessed operational prerequisites of the school and the area. (Lankinen 2001). For example, the City of Helsinki has had a project of positive discrimination in the areas where the parents' socio-economic background is lower than average.
34. In recent years the Ministry of Education and Culture has provided additional subsidies for educational equality and also for lowering group size in primary education. Some indicators were the location of the school and parents' socio-economic situation.

## 1.3 Organisation of ECEC and Primary Education

Changes proposed or occurred regarding organisation of your ECEC system.

35. ECEC is not mandatory in Finland.
36. Pre-primary education for 6-year-old children (about 4 h/day) has been mandatory since 1 August 2015.
37. ECEC and pre-primary education (as part of ECEC) are guided by different acts (ECEC/Act on ECEC, pre-primary education/Act on Basic Education).
38. Discussion regarding (lowering) the starting age of primary school (now 7 years) surfaces from time to time.
39. The distribution of lesson hours in basic education approved by the Finnish Government in 2012 did not bring any changes to the number of weekly lessons per year.

## 1.4 Distribution of Responsibilities

### Articulation or collaboration between the different levels of authorities involved in transitions, possible tensions.

40. In Finland, at the national level, laws and curricula which are mandatory to follow provide the minimum standards for activities conducted at the municipal and local levels. Some of the things are decided at the national level, some at the local level. Local authorities have great autonomy in organising transitions, including also implementing the curricula in local services.
41. Another level concerning transitions is: home – ECEC – pre-primary – primary school – after-school activities. In these transitions tensions arise from the typical practices on each level and discussing and fitting them together. These tensions are perhaps caused by levels (staff, managers) not knowing each other's aims, practices and so on.
42. ECEC personnel co-operate with their primary school colleagues. Some tensions between these two groups have been reported (Siniharju, 2007; Turunen & Rafferty, 2013). The collaboration is often regarded as knowledge transfer from ECEC to primary school, but some schools also run specific transition programmes.

## **Decision-making responsibilities between the different authorities and between the different levels of the administration**

### **Financial and physical resources**

43. No financial or physical resources as such at national level. Decisions made at local level.

### **Regulations and minimum standards for ECEC and primary education**

44. No regulations or minimum standards in national level other than curriculums. Municipalities decide their own policies and practices.

### **Curriculum development and assessment in ECEC and primary school**

45. FINEEH (Finnish Education Evaluation Centre) is responsible for evaluating the actualisation of the curriculum aims (gender equality, geographic background, local, between language groups and parents) in pre-primary and basic education at the national level in general, and also in the transition phases. There hasn't been actual evaluation on transitions between ECEC and primary school.
46. At the local level the actualisations of the local curriculum aims are evaluated by the measures that are decided by the local authorities.
47. Both the ECEC Act and the Basic Education Act have the regulations for evaluation, but these are not directly intended for evaluation transitions. The regulations on assessment in the ECEC Act are new and only came into force 1 August 2015.

### **Initial and ongoing education and training for staff**

48. There isn't specific in-service training for staff (ECEC, pre-primary, primary school or between them) on transitions. In basic training the curricula are decided by the universities, where teachers are trained. In training of practical nurses there is a national curriculum approved by the National Board of Education but transitions as a theme do not have a significant role in the curriculum.
49. The organisation and themes of in-service training are decided at the local level. For example, in Lapland the Regional State Administrative Agencies (AVI) annually organise a Preschool and Early Primary Conference. It is an important event that brings together both ECEC and primary school teachers all over Northern Finland. In 2013 there was a keynote lecture on transition to school.

50. The National Board of Education is organising in-service training for teachers. The personnel of ECEC has been included in the National Board of Education's in-service training only since 2015. The training themes have included many topics touching on transitions.
51. Qualifications of the staff are regulated by legislation.

### **Strategies to support staff in ensuring successful transitions**

52. Strategies to support staff are developed and decided at the municipal level. Strategies should be based on national obligatory curricula.

### **Deciding on transitions to primary education (if a child can start primary school) or delays in starting primary education);**

53. The actual decision is usually made by the education provider, which in Finland is most commonly the municipality. The decision is usually based on the parents', teachers' and principals' proposition.
54. In pre-primary education, the teaching and pedagogics should be organised in cooperation with the guardians so that all children receive teaching, guidance and support in accordance with their own development level and needs. A child in extended compulsory education must participate in pre-primary education organised during the starting year of their compulsory education. Children in extended compulsory education have the right to start their pre-primary education at the age of 5. A child in extended compulsory education and a child who starts their basic education a year later than their peers have the right to receive pre-primary education also during the year their compulsory education begins.
55. A child has the right to start basic education one year in advance if the child has, based on psychological and, if necessary, medical reviews, the capabilities to succeed in his or her studies. The organiser of education may, based on the aforementioned reviews, grant the child permission to start basic education a year later than stipulated.

Equity: strategies to support children with learning difficulties and disadvantages, as well as migrant children, before, during and after transitions (at ECEC and primary school level) – i.e. at what level and which authorities develop such strategies;

56. The guidelines come from legislation and NCC (=national core curricula), but the implementation is the responsibility of municipalities and their relevant authorities.
57. It is important that the knowledge about a child's need for support and support received during pre-primary education is also transmitted to basic education. The educational organisers are responsible for creating and developing the practices for smooth information flow. The information essential to organising education is delivered immediately to another organiser of pre-primary or basic education, without being hindered by a secrecy clause.

### **Organisation of the formal stakeholder consultation procedures on transitions**

58. They are organised at municipal level.

## **1.5 Monitoring Transitions**

### **Monitoring instruments in transitions**

59. Instruments and methods are decided at local level.

### **Common monitoring cycle or practice of monitoring transitions at national, regional or local level.**

60. Finnish Education Evaluation Centre, FINEEH is responsible for evaluating ECEC, pre-primary and basic education at national level. The themes for evaluation are decided in a common process between FINEEH and the Ministry of Education and Culture. At local level the municipalities are responsible for monitoring transitions.

## Chapter 2. Professional Continuity

This chapter will clarify how professional continuity is ensured or arranged in Finland.

### 2.1 Leadership

The role of managers/head teachers in ensuring smooth transitions for children between ECEC and primary school

61. Managers in schools and ECEC centres are responsible for policies concerning pedagogy and curriculum and also for setting aims and practices for transitions. Managers are decision-makers in the matter of transitions and for the decisions also concerning individual children, although managers are usually not the persons to conduct transitions.

### 2.2 Staff Support for Transitions

Material resources available for staff to help smoothen transitions at from ECEC to primary school

62. There are no mandatory or national materials for staff to use in their job.
63. Knowledge from the research to develop practices, but this is responsible for every teacher or manager themselves to find out and carry out.
64. There are more material for the parents and children, such as:
  - The National Board on Education has published brochures for children who start school. Also NGOs.
  - ECEC centres and schools have done different kinds of “Welcome” and info-materials for parents and children.
  - ECEC centres and schools have “becoming acquainted” days for newcomers.

65. Besides the goals set in the national core curriculum, the providers of ECEC and basic education have to describe in their local curriculum the goals, practices and cooperation in the transition phase.
66. The Finnish National Board of Education has published on its website a Finnish translation of the international 'Transition to school position statement.' The statement helps professionals create better transition practices locally. [http://www.edu.fi/download/151735\\_onnistunut\\_koulun\\_aloittaminen.pdf](http://www.edu.fi/download/151735_onnistunut_koulun_aloittaminen.pdf)
67. In addition to this, the municipalities have materials related to, for example, pupil welfare, for both pre-primary education and basic education. At the national level, guidelines for pupil welfare have been provided. With regard to pre-primary education, guidelines for pupil welfare are about to be launched.
68. Additionally, the units of pre-primary and basic education work together in order to support the transitions. The operational practises are municipality-specific. A kindergarten teacher of pre-primary education can, for example, discuss the children's transitioning to school with the future teacher (if the parents have granted permission for this).

### Human resources commonly available for staff

69. No additional human resources are available for transitions. In some cases the child might have an assistant, or there is an assistant in the class/group of children.
70. For years, at the start of the first school year, there has been a practice of "smooth start of school" (meaning shorter school days in the first 4–5 weeks and also splitting the group into two halves for some lessons) but it isn't very relevant anymore because of the pre-primary year.
71. In many cases, at the start of ECEC, there are things that the child can "practise" (smooth start / for example shorter time / day) while being at family day care or ECEC centre for several days before entering ECEC. Parents can also be present with the child. This practice phase is usually for a couple of days, but in some cases it can last up to two weeks. Some municipalities require the parents to be with the child for at least a few days. Some municipalities have a practice where a staff member goes to visit (usually one at a time) the child in his or her home, just to get to know

the child and family better, and also give information on the transition phase from home to ECEC services.

72. The Finnish education system as a whole emphasises support and well-being. We have a strong tradition of multi-professional cooperation in promoting children's growth, well-being and learning. There are actually two support systems which are not created specifically for transition phases, but which are also helpful in these.

1. The support system for the child's growth and learning is based on the Act on ECEC and Act on Basic Education. There are also specific sections in the national core curricula (ECEC, Pre-Primary Education and Basic Education) to set the goals and describe the practices needed. Local practises are developed according to these curriculum guidelines.
2. The system of pupil welfare is based on the Student Welfare Act 1287/2013. The Act sets goals for both Pre-primary and basic education. The main ideas of the Student Welfare Act are clarified in the national core curricula and in local curricula.

Both systems create a strong "welfare net" for the children and their parents. ECEC and school personnel (teachers, principals, heads of day care centres) cooperate with special needs education personnel and social and health care personnel to give the necessary support for each individual child.

## Chapter 3. Pedagogical Continuity

This chapter is concerned with how pedagogical continuity is ensured between early learning and primary education.

### 3.1 Curriculum Framework and Development Goals

73. In Finland we have three separate national curricula: for ECEC, pre-primary education and primary education. The curriculum for ECEC is currently being reformed and the new core curriculum will be launched in autumn 2016. The main differences between the curriculum of primary education and the other two is that in primary education the curriculum is subject area-based and sets aims to children's learning.
74. Finnish ECEC has a play-based curriculum with an edu-care approach. Pre-primary education has its own curriculum, which since the 2000 pre-primary education reform has moved towards a more school-like approach (Turunen, Uusiautti, & Määttä, 2014). The most recent Core Curriculum for Pre-Primary Education 2014 is written in a similar way with the corresponding curriculum in basic education.
75. There is an ongoing curriculum reform in Finland at the moment (2016). In our system the national core curricula form a basis to create local curricula. The national core curriculum for Pre-Primary and Basic education (school) was completed at the end of 2014. Local curricula will be taken into action from the beginning of the 2016-2017 term.
76. The national core curriculum process for ECEC (years 0–6) is going on at the moment (2016). Local ECEC curricula based on the national core curricula will be taken into action from the beginning of the 2017–2018 term.

77. All three (ECEC, Pre-Primary and Basic Education) national curricula stress that it is important that early childhood education and care, with pre-primary education being part of it, and basic education form an entity that proceeds consistently in terms of the child's growth and learning. Therefore there are similarities in curricula. For instance there are goals for transversal competencies in each phase of the educational path. The main difference is that ECEC is integrative/ holistic in nature and basic education is based on subjects. Thus, very often the instruction in the first two school grades are organised in an integrative / cross-curricular way.
78. The goals of language learning in ECEC and school are set to form continuity. Individual differences are taken into account. Each child has a right to learn and also a right to get support if needed. There are no common goals or learning standards for children in ECEC settings. Individual differences and possible needs for support are also taken into account at school. Individual progress is possible even though there are learning goals for each school year.

### **Flexibility on regional and local authorities, as well as settings and staff to adapt the curriculum framework**

79. The earlier national curriculum guidelines for ECEC was voluntary instead of mandatory (nevertheless almost every municipality adapted it). This changed on 1 August 2015 when the ECEC Act came into force and the curriculum for ECEC became mandatory. The new national core curriculum for ECEC will be published in October 2016.
80. Curricula for pre-primary education and primary education are mandatory.
81. All of the aforementioned three curricula are so-called core curricula, giving quite large opportunities for schools and ECEC services and individual teacher/staff to adapt them for their own activities. Teachers have to follow the local curriculum, but they have pedagogical freedom to plan and teach, use materials, learning environments etc. in the way they find best.
82. Municipalities and other educational providers are required to make a local curriculum based on the national core curriculum. If the provider decides so, there can also be a single unit / school level curriculum.

### **Considerable changes (in the last five years) occurred in ECEC and/or primary school curriculum or development goals to ensure better pedagogical continuity?**

83. The core curriculum for pre-primary education is going to influence the core curriculum for ECEC (in process). In the current curriculum guidelines for ECEC there has been an alignment towards pre-primary and primary curricula concerning subjects.
84. The core curriculum for pre-primary education has been aligned towards the curriculum for primary education.
85. Now that the ECEC is part of educational policy in Finland (since 1 January 2013), curricula can be regarded as more a pedagogical entity and a more conscious pedagogical alignment between different curricula can be built. Still, there is a need to preserve the identity and typical features of every curriculum.

## **3.2 Pedagogy**

### **Pedagogical approach for (the last year in) ECEC and/or primary school**

86. A very important change in Finnish ECEC pedagogy occurred on 1 August 2015 when the new Act on ECEC came into force. In the Act, pedagogy is emphasised in terms of aims and also in the definition of ECEC, for example.
87. The pedagogical approaches typically used to draw on socioconstructivist theories, specifically the work of Vygotsky (Vygotsky, 1962, 1978, 1987).
88. The Finnish National Board of Education is in charge of curriculum development in ECEC, pre-primary education and basic education. There are no fundamental differences in background theories. In Finland there is a core idea that there can be different kinds of emphasis on certain alternative pedagogies (for example Montessori), but these have to be founded and aligned on the national curriculum and so called "general pedagogy." For instance Bronfenbrenner's systems theory contains influences from Fröbel, Malaguzzi, Montessori and Vygotsky. The curriculum process has also been influenced by recent national and international research, such as Lipponen, Karila, Lerkkanen, Lavonen, Korkeamäki, Trageton and Pramling.

89. Teachers are free to use any pedagogical approach they feel is suited to reach the learning and developmental goals stated in the national core curriculum and localised curriculum that is based on the national curriculum framework. In addition, there is a personalised curriculum created for each pupil to address his/her personalised learning and developmental goals. The personalised curriculum is co-constructed with the teacher, parents and the child.
90. The pedagogical approaches commonly used and that are also implicitly stated in the national core curriculum emphasise play-based pedagogies, child-centred and driven activities, collaborative learning activities, experiential learning activities, dialogic teaching and learning activities, hands-on and minds-on learning activities, inquiry learning activities, outdoor learning activities, multimodal learning activities, embodied learning activities and pedagogical documentation.
91. The ECEC represents play and child-directed activities, such as being able to move freely and choose more freely what to do, whereas primary school represents more structured, adult-directed engagement and learning (Salmi & Kumpulainen, 2016). The physical and material arrangements also differ between ECEC and primary school. The child is also positioned in a more active role in the ECEC compared to primary school (Salmi & Kumpulainen, 2016).

### **Main differences between a regular primary school day (in first year of primary school) and last year of ECEC**

92. No big difference on the duration of the day (3-5 hours/day) in pre-primary education and first year of school but most children (about 70 %) attending pre-primary education also use ECEC services after pre-primary education. In primary school the difference is subjects and only one teacher / class. In ECEC teaching is not subject-based, it is more holistic.
93. The ECEC represents play and child-directed activities, such as being able to move freely and choose more freely what to do, whereas primary school represents more structured, adult-directed engagement and learning (Salmi & Kumpulainen, 2016). The physical and material arrangements also differ between ECEC and primary school; these also create different conditions for children to exercise their agency and engagement in learning.

### 3.3 Child Development

#### Child development monitoring tools and practices commonly in place in the transition year only

94. There are no national tests for pre-primary education (6-year-old children) in Finland. Children's development is constantly monitored through ECEC and pre-primary education, but national tests are not conducted. Some tests may also be used but it is up to the municipality, the education provider, to make the decision on the tests.
95. Portfolios are commonly used but the decision to use them is made by the local authorities.

#### Children and/or parents involvement in the child development monitoring practice in the final year before primary school?

96. Parents are involved, they have the right to do so and also decide on monitoring practices made to their children.
97. In the ECEC Act there are regulations on children's and parents participation and influencing possibilities. Children and parents are typically involved in monitoring and reflecting upon the child's development. Co-construction of the monitoring processes is emphasised.
98. Parents are an integral part of planning their child's activities in ECEC and during the year in pre-primary education. Also children's views are taken into account. There is research evidence that familiarity and good relationships between parents and ECEC teachers promote individual planning for children, but parents and teachers might have different perceptions of the usefulness of planning (Turunen, 2012).

#### Additional support for children in developmental delay in the final year before starting primary school

99. A child receives individual help according to his/her needs both in ECEC or in pre-primary education. In the Basic Education Act concerning pre-primary education the levels for support are mentioned: "general" support, intensive support and special support. A child could also start the school year after (8 years, "late start") the usual age (7 years) if that is needed. In that case the child is tested by a relevant expert and a written report/statement/recommendation for a delayed start will be written for him/her. It is also

possible that a child could start school one year earlier (6 years, “extended start”). Then the child will usually have two years of pre-primary education (5-7 years) and is usually handicapped. If parents want to send their children to school a year before primary school usually starts (6 years, usually for the reason that the child was born at the start of the year or the child is very mature for his/her age), it is their responsibility to have the child tested. Schools can themselves decide whether they will accept this child to school.

100. In ECEC it is obligatory to do a child’s individual ECEC plan. In pre-primary education it isn’t obligatory. The plan includes observation of the child, aims for the activities/pedagogy and for the staff to work with the child according to the child’s needs. It should also include parents and the child’s own opinions. For children who will need special support, those activities will be implemented in this plan or in the individual learning plan in pre-primary education and schools.

### 3.4 Collaboration between Authorities and ECEC/Primary School on Pedagogical Continuity

101. Core Curriculum for Pre-Primary education 2014 states (section 1.2): “Under the Basic Education Act, education providers are to prepare the curriculum for pre-primary education in cooperation with authorities in charge of social and health care services in the municipality<sup>3</sup>. In order to secure a continuous learning path for the children, it is important to provide an opportunity for other early childhood and basic education personnel to familiarise themselves with and participate in the preparation and development of the curriculum for pre-primary education.”
102. In municipalities there are practices where staff on ECEC, pre-primary and primary education work together to implement curricula and also develop co-operation concerning transitions.
103. Collaboration, knowledge exchange practices, shared responsibilities between preschool and primary school teachers, and the alignment of teaching practices and philosophies between the two institutional contexts are valued in the Finnish education system for ensuring children’s proper transitioning to primary school (Ahtola et al., 2011).

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<sup>3</sup> Section 15(2) of the Basic Education Act (477/2003)

## Chapter 4. Developmental Continuity

This chapter is concerned how developmental continuity is established in Finland.

### 4.1 Collaborations with the Child

#### Preparing children for primary school in ECEC

104. In National Core Curricula there are no specific guidelines on how to prepare children for pre-primary or primary education. The Finnish “philosophy” consists of thinking that every and all activities in the setting prepares children for the next level, so to speak. Of course, the transition is being discussed with the child and parents. The aim of ECEC and pre-primary education is to support the child’s independence and self-acting, and provide skills for children to learn.
105. Children go (depending on local stakeholders) visit the school a day or so before the beginning of school, and maybe meet the teacher beforehand.
106. From the perspective of research, reinforcing the children’s role as operators also in the context of school transition is important for the development of the child’s capabilities. If the child receives the opportunity to be included in the matters and changes affecting their life, they will have an experience of being an active participant and can thereby commit to matters more deeply. (Lipponen et al. 2013)
107. It has been proven by research that positive experiences related to school transition have a large impact on the child’s well-being, the development of their identity, school attachment and development of academic skills. (Ahtola et al. 2011; Chan 2012)

#### Children’s views on the preparation for primary school in ECEC

108. In the ECEC Act there are regulations on children’s and parents participation and possibilities to influence.

109. This is done at the municipal level and not directed from the national level. Practices differ.

## 4.2 Collaborations with the Home Environment

110. Schools (and also ECEC) give information to parents on how to prepare the child for the start of pre-primary education and school. Usually parents can attend the first hours of the first school day (and the doors are always open), there are parent-occasions at the start of the school year and other regular meetings especially during the first school year.

## 4.3 Collaborations at Setting Level

111. Mostly this is done at the local level, for example in certain areas where schools and ECEC centres plan (joint guidelines, practices, evaluation could be made) together how to conduct collaborations of good transitions.

## 4.4 Collaborations with Early Childhood Services and other Settings, Agencies or Organisations

112. This is not very holistic, planned or goal-oriented in Finland. In case of special support there are more authorities involved with the transition process and co-operation should be planned and organised.

After-school activities could, for example, have NGOs as organisers, so they will be one stakeholder for the quality transitions.

113. ECEC and pre-primary education can be connected with the morning and after-school activities of school pupils. (For example, Strandell 2012)
114. ECEC and children's health clinics have cooperation at municipal level. One way of collaboration between children's health clinic and ECEC is Hyve 4 (a health check-up for 4-year-olds), which has been developed based on research data, according to which 'the problems with learning during the early stages of schooling can be predicted well enough already when the child is 4 years old.'

## Chapter 5. Challenges and Strategies

This chapter intends to collect information on what challenges in Finland is experienced in transitions in general, and in ensuring professional, pedagogical and developmental continuity in particular

### 5.1 Main Challenges

115. The main challenge is to observe and see the Finnish transition system in a holistic perspective, not only as individual parts of the system. It is essential to see the many horizontal and vertical transitions where the child and parents experience various levels of transitions (home – ECEC – pre-primary education – primary education – after school activities...). It is important to see that developing transition is a very large and multitasked theme, pedagogical, developmental, professional (staff, teachers, managers other authorities and stakeholders). One view with regard to children transitioning to school from home is that the children's age in ECEC varies from 1-year-olds to 5-year-olds. The child's age has a large impact on the transition and its planning.
116. Maybe in Finland we lack for the visible and clear national guidelines or policy programme for transitions. We lack also a network of research and good practices of the matter.
117. The municipalities are in charge of the ECEC and basic education and the necessary multidisciplinary cooperation. In most municipalities, ECEC and basic education matters are managed by the same administrative branch. This has facilitated the development of transition practices.
118. The transition practices vary locally, which is why the matter has been specified in curricula. However, there is still room for improvement locally, with regard to the cooperation between the experts representing

the different professional fields as well as the operational models. The information concerning the children is not always transferred as quickly and comprehensively as necessary. Further challenges are brought on by the fact that day care centres and schools are often in different buildings and may be located far away from each other. The more modern school buildings are now mainly designed to be community centres, where it is easier to develop a continuum.

119. The school start of children from multi-cultural backgrounds should be further developed.
120. In Finland, transition to school is often regarded as forwarding information from one institution to another, e.g. from pre-primary education to primary school. The needs of children and families can be overtaken if the focus is on the institutions. The main challenge is to bring the children and their families in the centre and subjects of the transition process.

### **Main challenges on:**

#### ***Ensuring professional continuity:***

121. ECEC teachers and primary education teachers' education concerning transitions does not differ. The bigger challenge is that there should be more common goals for organising transitions.

#### ***Ensuring pedagogical continuity:***

122. No major challenges. Of course, the National Core Curricula and local curricula could be even more aligned when it comes to transition. It is important that different core curricula have stressed continuity for a long time.

#### ***Ensuring developmental continuity:***

123. Parents and also children should be more informed and involved with the transitions. According to research by Karikoski (2008), there still can be challenges on parental participation.
124. Cooperation with families with many problems or with families from multicultural backgrounds is a challenge.

125. Our systems of school and ECEC are quite rigid institutes with their working culture, practices and policies, they are not easy to change when it comes to developing transitions. Transitions are sometimes a kind of boundary surface, where it is difficult to identify who is the “owner” or responsible part in that issue. It is still quite new or even radical thinking that schools should be ready for children instead of the other way around. So it might be difficult for ECEC, for example, to reflect on their own practises critically and see what can be done differently in ECEC services to smoothen the child’s way to pre-primary or school. Or how should schools think or change their own systems from the view of good transitions, child’s benefit, parental satisfaction and so on. It is very crucial that different kinds of services know each other properly.

### **Main areas of disagreement between the relevant stakeholders about:**

#### ***Current transition policies;***

126. Not to disagree, but we don’t have a specific transition policy in Finland other than what could be found in curricula.

#### ***Professional continuity***

127. No particular challenges.

128. Everyone agrees at the national, local and unit level about the importance of professional continuity, and everyone wants to collaborate to have better transition for children and better co-operation between staff. We have differences of salaries between schools (better salaries in schools) and ECEC staff, but we don’t see this as reason for possible disagreements regarding the transition theme. Previous texts have elaborated on these disagreements if any (and of course there is at some point). So, it is more a question of ways to co-operate and the culture of how to do things together.

#### ***Pedagogical continuity***

129. The fact that the Finnish National Board of Education is responsible for curriculum development at all levels from ECEC to upper secondary education ensures the continuity of steering.

130. This has been discussed between different stakeholders in Finland when preparing curricula for ECEC, pre-primary or primary education. This is

happening right now concerning ECEC and in 2014 when preparing core curricula for primary and pre-primary education. Now the implementation phase is going on in municipalities, also concerning the transition guidelines in curricula.

### ***Developmental continuity***

131. There is considerable agreement that parents and children should be involved more. There is need for developing new participatory practices to involve parents. There is also much agreement that there should be more cooperation between schools and ECEC in general.

### **Changes planned regarding:**

#### ***Professional continuity for transitions? Which ones? Is there any evidence, qualitative or quantitative, whether these changes have been effective?***

132. New core curricula in pre-primary and basic education stress transition and continuity more than before. It is too early to provide evidence, because new core curricula will be implemented from 2016 and 2017 onwards.
133. The Ministry of Education and Culture has set up a high-level national forum for developing teacher education (2016).

#### ***Pedagogical continuity for transitions***

134. Not yet this kind of activities.

#### ***Developmental continuity for transitions?***

135. Not yet this kind of activities.

## **5.2 Strategies to Overcome Challenges**

136. No certain strategies planned at the national level. At the local level different services plan their own or joint strategies to conduct transitions. For several years the general understanding in Finnish educational policy has been that quality transitions require good cooperation and planning, as well as evaluation.

137. The new ECEC Act stresses parental participation. It also has regulations on assessment at local and national level. Qualification requirements for pre-primary teachers are higher than in general ECEC settings. The fact that the Finnish National Board of Education is responsible for curriculum development at all levels from ECEC to upper secondary education ensures the continuity of steering.
138. The state funds continuous professional development for teaching personnel at all levels also in themes relevant to transition practices.
139. In education, shared study courses for kindergarten teacher students and class teacher students enable dialogue. In the University of Helsinki, a study course like this that is directly related to school transition is, for example, Theory and didactics of pre-primary and primary education, which is mandatory for teacher students.

## References

### Acts

Act on Early Childhood Education and Care 36/1973.  
 Act on Basic Education 628/1998  
 Student Welfare Act 1287/2013.

### Curriculums

Core Curriculum for early Childhood Education ( in process, to be published 10/2016)  
[http://www.oph.fi/english/education\\_system/early\\_childhood\\_education](http://www.oph.fi/english/education_system/early_childhood_education)  
 Core Curriculum for Basic Education  
[http://www.oph.fi/english/curricula\\_and\\_qualifications/basic\\_education](http://www.oph.fi/english/curricula_and_qualifications/basic_education)  
 Core Curriculum for Pre-Primary Education  
[http://www.oph.fi/download/153504\\_national\\_core\\_curriculum\\_for\\_pre-primary\\_education\\_2010.pdf](http://www.oph.fi/download/153504_national_core_curriculum_for_pre-primary_education_2010.pdf)  
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## Research and researchers of Transitions from ECEC to school in Finland

*Edited by:* Kirsi Alila, Ministry of Education and Culture, Department of General Education and Early Childhood Education

The attached list compiles the Finnish transition research and researchers of Finnish universities. This list is not complete. The list has been produced in cooperation with the universities. The contact information for each university has also been listed for possible enquiries.

### Articles from Finnish researchers on transition

- Ahtola, A., Silinskas, G., Poikonen, P. L., Niemi, P., & Nurmi, J. E. (2011). Transition to formal schooling: Do transition practices matter for academic performance? *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 26, 295–302.
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Professor **Kirsti Karila** ([kirsti.karila@uta.fi](mailto:kirsti.karila@uta.fi)) and PhD candidate Laura Rantavuori ([laura.rantavuori@uta.fi](mailto:laura.rantavuori@uta.fi))

Karila, K. & Rantavuori, L. (2014) Discourses at the boundary spaces: developing a fluent transition from preschool to school, *Early Years: An International Research Journal*, 34:4, 377–391, DOI: 10.1080/09575146.2014.967663

In the project, "Crossing Institutional and Professional Boundaries in the Transition from Preschool to school", Karila and Rantavuori concentrate on the transition from preschool to school. Rantavuori conducts her doctoral dissertation Joint preschool and school education as the *boundary spaces, tensions and relational agency process* of two activity systems as a part of the project.

The study is conducted in the context of a municipal-level development process related to the transition from preschool to school. According to the municipal-level strategy plan, schools and preschools were expected to develop joint practices for preschool and primary school children. The aim of these joint practices was to make the transition from preschool to school as fluent as possible. In the municipality under study, the long-term aim is to develop transition phase practices that enable children to start compulsory school flexibly on the basis of their individual competencies. The units, which had joined the development project, were asked to participate in the present research project. The study applies qualitative methodology and its design is based on the case study approach.

(pre-school environment, transition) This article examines the preschool-school transition in the Finnish school system from institutional and professional perspectives. It takes place in a context in which the fluent transition from preschool to primary school is supported by developing joint lessons for preschool and primary school children. Transition is seen as a process in which culturally and historically constructed institutional boundaries form an arena for professional learning. The study focuses on boundary work and boundary spaces. Boundaries are seen as spaces where resources from different practices are brought together to expand interpretations of multifaceted tasks. The data are analyzed from a discursive perspective. The study investigates how professionals create new forms of activity when collaborating in boundary spaces. Three discursive frames were identified. The first is called the 'initiative frame', the second the 'consensus frame' and the third the 'collaboration frame'. These frames are considered in relation to creating new, shared practices and a common object of activity.

Karila, K., Kivimäki, M. & Rantavuori, L. (2013). Kasvatusinstituutiot kohtaavat. Joustava esi- ja alkuopetus yhteisöjen ja opettajien oppimisen haasteena. In K. Karila, L. Lipponen & K. Pyhälto (eds.) Päiväkodista peruskouluun. Siirtymät varhaiskasvatukseen, esi- ja alkuopetuksen rajapinnoilla. Helsinki: Opetushallitus, 25–38. (Raportit ja selvitykset 2013:17). NOT AVAILABLE IN ENGLISH.

Karila K., Lipponen L. & Pyhälto, K. (2013). Yhteenvettoa: Siirtymät varhaiskasvatukseen, esiopetuksen ja perusopetuksen haasteena. In K. Karila, L. Lipponen & K. Pyhälto (eds.) Päiväkodista peruskouluun: Siirtymät varhaiskasvatukseen, esi- ja alkuopetuksen rajapinnoilla. Helsinki: Opetushallitus, 53–54. (Raportit ja selvitykset 2013:17).

NOT AVAILABLE IN ENGLISH.

## University of Oulu

**Eila Estola**, professor, early childhood education

Faculty of Education, P.O.Box 2000, FI-90014 University of Oulu, tel. +358 50 350 1885

**Hannele Karikoski**, Starting school as an ecological transition. Parents as informants in the transit of children from pre-school to school environments. Faculty of Education, Department of Educational Sciences and Teacher Education, University of Oulu, P.O.Box 2000, FI-90014 University of Oulu, Finland. Acta Univ. Oul. E 100, 2008. Oulu, Finland

### Abstract

In this study I examine how the parents describe the child's starting school as an ecological transition from pre-school to school growth environments. This concept is based on Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory. In terms of time-frames starting school is understood as a transition process which begins in the pre-school year, continues during the first school year and includes changes in the child's growth environment as well as in the child's role. The data derives from interviews with 21 parents of children from diverse educational contexts and the journals and interviews of parents from an additional three families.

In this study, a child's growth environment changed during the transition process from a child-centred, play- and learning environment to a goal-oriented learning and teaching environment directed by the teacher; from a social growth environment to a more individual working environment; and from a preparatory working culture (directed towards school-attendance) to an educative working culture aimed at citizenship. The child's role changed in the process from that of a pre-schooler to a school beginner, to a school child. This study brings in the school beginner's role.

The transition process was most flexible for pre-schoolers from the combined class, secure and multi-phased for pre-schoolers from the pre-school and school co-operation unit. For the Montessori child the transition was natural and quick, for pre-schoolers from the day-care unit, it was longest and most problematic. In conclusion, my research suggests that, although our school system aims to be equal for all, this is not the reality during the pre-school and school starting phases. However, by the end of the first school year all the children in this study had adjusted to the school context. They had fulfilled the criteria and

expectations set for the role of the school child: such as becoming an academic learner; a performer of tasks, an object of evaluation; a responsible, concerned and well-behaved pupil, and a school companion. In summary, the school working-culture had a powerful homogenizing effect, adjusting the child to the school and to the role of school child.

**Kinnunen, Susanna**, How are you? – The narrative in-between spaces in young children’s daily lives

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#### **Abstract**

This research focuses on studying spontaneously composed narrative in-between spaces in young children’s everyday life contexts, including home and day care, and in cooperation between these contexts. The study examines how children’s relations are shaped and reshaped in narrative in-between spaces.

The theories and methodology applied in this research are inspired by artistic and narrative childhood research. The main methods for constructing the research material draw on narrative ethnography intertwined with visual methods. The research material was generated through three different processes in and between home and day care center contexts. The study is in line with the recent discussion of childhood research that challenges the simple understandings of children’s participation and voice. The study considers how to construct knowledge together with children, both in educational research and practices, in a critical and diffractive way.

The main findings reveal that the spontaneously formed narrative in-between spaces enable children and adults to encounter the unplanned together; call for aesthetic sensitiveness toward others; enhance intergenerational co-agency; and create and maintain caring reciprocity and continuity. These aspects require and promote the confidence between children and adults as well as among adults. Theoretically, the study opens potential perspectives into narrative research with young children through the concepts of narrative in-between space and the aesthetics of listening. The concepts challenge researchers to acknowledge the significance of being present for children and creating spaces for different children to narrate in multiple ways.

Methodologically, the study points out that the spontaneous narration processes provide opportunities for children to use their favorite modes of narration and consequently enable their multiple voices to be heard. Pedagogically, the study encourages researchers

and educators to acknowledge the potential involved in children's spontaneous narration. The study shows that spontaneously formed narrative in-between spaces create valuable situations to share children's home stories and other important matters. Finally, the study urges/encourages the parents and professionals to strengthen the position of the child in the cooperation practices between day care and home and offers a concrete means of involving children in cooperation.

*Keywords:* aesthetics, childhood, daily life, multimodal narration, narrative in-between space, relational

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Social ecologies of resilience among at-risk children starting school in South Africa and Finland: A visual participatory study (SISU). Years 2014-2016, Funder: Academy of Finland. Principal investigator: Kristiina Kumpulainen, University of Helsinki.

### Abstract

Social ecologies of resilience among at-risk children starting school in South Africa and Finland: A visual participatory research project (SISU) contributes to the joint call on children and youth of the National Research Foundation of South Africa and the Academy of Finland by increasing present day knowledge of protective processes that promote children's resilient management of transitions to starting school. The leading objective of the research project is to explain why, and how some at-risk South African and Finnish children make positive transitions to school. The second objective is to identify sociocultural processes embedded in the children's social ecologies that support their resilience in successful school transitions. A third objective is to examine and further develop participatory visual research methodologies for investigating and promoting children's resilience and positive adaptation to school. The research project is framed by the Social Ecology of Resilience theory (Ungar, 2011) which emphasizes the cultural and contextual nature of resilience. Additionally, the project draws on sociocultural theories to understand how the funds of knowledge of children's social ecologies support their boundary crossing and positive adaptation to school (Forman, Minick, & Stone 1993; González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). In applying visual participatory methodologies, the research project provides a nuanced understanding of sociocultural processes engendering children's positive transitioning to school. In doing so, the study contributes

to the development of culturally sensitive protective mechanisms, for educational purposes in particular, that increase children's socio-emotional well-being and enable young learners both in South Africa and Finland to overcome inequalities and risk of marginalization.

### Short abstract

Positive adjustment to starting school is crucial to subsequent engagement in formal education as well as to children's general healthy development and wellbeing. However, research shows that there are a growing number of children both in South Africa and Finland who transition and adjust poorly to formal schooling. This research project increases present day knowledge of protective processes that promote children's resilient management of transitions to starting school. While applying visual participatory methodologies, the project provides a nuanced understanding of sociocultural processes engendering children's positive transitioning to school. In doing so, the study contributes to the development of culturally sensitive protective mechanisms, for educational purposes in particular, that increase children's socio-emotional well-being and enable young learners both in South Africa and Finland to overcome inequalities and risk of marginalization.

Kumpulainen, K., Theron, L., Kahl, C., Bezuidenhout, C., Mikkola, A., Salmi, S., Khumalo, T., & Malmivaara-Uusitalo, L. (2015). Children's positive adjustment to first grade in risk-filled communities: A case study of the role of school ecologies in South-Africa and Finland. *School Psychology International*, 1–19. DOI: 10.1177/0143034315614687

Salmi, S., & Kumpulainen, K. (2016). Children's experiencing of their transition from preschool to first grade: The interaction between motives and demands. *Learning, Culture and Social Interaction*. Manuscript submitted for publication.

Salmi, S., & Kumpulainen, K. (2016). Children's experiencing of their transition from preschool to first grade: The interaction between motives and demands. *Learning, Culture and Social Interaction*. Manuscript submitted for publication.

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Recent work on transitions in the field of Early Childhood Education in the Department of Education at the University of Jyväskylä has focused mainly on small-scale, daily transitions.

Rutanen, Niina (in process). Spatial perspective on everyday transitions within a toddler group care setting. In G. Quiñones, L. Li and A. Ridgway (eds.) *Studying Babies and Toddlers: Relationships in Cultural Contexts*. Springer.

Rutanen, Niina (2012). Socio-spatial practices in a Finnish daycare group for 1 to 3-year-olds. *Early Years: An International Journal of Research and Development* 32 (2), 201–214.

Rutanen, Niina & Karila, Kirsti (2013). Institutionaaliset siirtymät alle kolmivuotiaista viskareiden ja eskareiden kautta kouluun. In K. Karila, L. Lipponen & K. Pyhälä (eds.) *Päiväkodista peruskouluun. Siirtymät varhaiskasvatukseen, esi- ja alkuopetuksen rajapinnoilla*. OPH Raportit ja selvitykset 2013:17 Helsinki: Opetus-

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- IN review: [Rutanan, N. & Hännikäinen, M. (2015) Care, upbringing and teaching in horizontal transitions in toddler day-care groups] Springer Publications: "Policy and pedagogy with under-three-year-olds: Cross-disciplinary insights and innovations for educational research with very young children". Editors: Jayne White ja Carmen Dalli. Manuscript submitted for publication.

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### Publications related to pre-school and transition to school:

- Turunen, T.A. (2011). Memories about starting school. What is remembered after decades? *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*.
- Turunen, T. A., Dockett, S., & Perry, B. (2015). Researching memories about starting school: Autobiographical narratives as a methodological approach. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 23(5), 635–644.
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- Turunen, T.A. & Dockett, S. (2013) Family members' memories about starting school. *Intergenerational aspects*. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*. 32(2), 103-110.
- Petriwskyj, A., O'Gorman, L. & Turunen, T.A. (2013). The interface of the national Australian Curriculum and the pre-Year 1 class in school: Exploring tensions. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*. 38(1), 16–22.
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Ulla Härkönen. 2013. *Pedagogical systems theory as a cornerstone of sustainable early childhood and preschool education*. p. 411–449. Publications of the University of Eastern Finland

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