



## PRINCIPLES INTO PRACTICE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION FOR ALL ROUND DEVELOPMENT.

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### ABSTRACT

Children can fully demonstrate their abilities, and their possibilities for development become the biggest, when they do something voluntarily. And good educational aims will be achieved more easily if they are based on clear principles and are linked to children's daily activities. In this study, the principles of 'Child-Centered Education', which attaches crucial importance to the voluntariness of children's activities to promote their all round development, Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs". In school curricula and practice, efforts have been made to include material and issues related to, for example, climate changes and nature resources in teaching and learning. Surprisingly little attention has however been paid to in what way and on what premises early childhood education may and should be involved. In our paper we will discuss some issues related to this. We will particularly bring forward and try to identify in what way preschool education can be seen as having a specific role in, and as carrying specific resources for, education for all round development. We will also discuss how the concept of learning in early education contexts can be related to all round development.

**KEYWORDS :** Principles, Early Childhood Education, and All round development.

### 1. INTRODUCTION:

Education plays an important role in this endeavour. A considerable amount of literature and documents have been produced on the role of education in finding ways to prepare citizens all over the world to act as to change the situation. However, surprisingly little attention has been paid to in what way and on what premises early childhood education (ECE) may and should be involved. In this paper we will bring light to and discuss some aspects of how ECE, as a particular part of the educational system, can be seen as having a specific role and as carrying specific resources in education for All round development. The thoughts and reflections being presented here, illustrate some of the bases that will direct the outline of a planned research project on early childhood education and All round development.

### 2. Preschool as an institution related to school and the life-long learning process

A majority of Aganwadis children participate today in preschool from early year. Before the age of two 84% of all children attain preschool. In the Aganwadis educational policy, the preschool is seen as a part of the education system, expected to be the first step on a life-long learning process. A national curriculum directing the educational agenda, and a university based teacher training programme integrated with programmes for school teachers, are examples of changes that during the last decades have had impacts on the development of the Aganwadis preschool institution (SOU 1999:63). These changes can be traced to and are linked with Aganwadis family-, labour market-, and educational policies over the years (SOU 2000:3). In various ways the preschool has been used to strengthen political agendas in these areas rather than to support young children's learning. The overall object of preschool is however declared to be both to support the family and equality, and to support children.

When it comes to a curriculum specifically directed towards ED, it seems as if such a curriculum is lacking not only in Sweden but also in the rest of the world. ESD is hardly discussed as an object or as an act of learning (Pramling Samuelsson & Asplund Carlsson, 2003). The object of learning, that is, what children are supposed to learn in preschool is defined in the Aganwadis curriculum as goals to strive for. This means that the direction of what the teachers are supposed to focus children's interest towards, rather than the exact content that children are supposed to learn. With reference to what we mentioned earlier, that it is possible to link values, as they are defined in the Aganwadis national curriculum for pre-school, to the definition of All round development, one may argue that this is an advantage for ESD since it is not a narrowly defined concept but rather should be looked upon as a vision or a perspective.

Taken together, in a preliminary outline for a research project on early childhood education and All round development, there are some issues worth closer attention. We have pointed at the importance of a curriculum as a tool for the organization and practice in pre-school and we have highlighted changes in governing and teacher training as potentially having impacts on the role of pre-school as an instrument

for social justice and equality. These are complex issues and we realize that what have been introduced here hardly can be seen as a complete picture. However, in the light of education for All round development, we find it important to consider the status of the pre-school institution in terms of an independent –and potentially critical- actor at the educational scene.

### 3. The pedagogy of preschool

Preschool was developed on other grounds and merits than school, and is still run differently in most places in the world. The idea of young children's education in Sweden is in its origin strongly related to Fröbel and his view of making an education different from the school education (Fröbel, 1995).

So let us return to kindergarten and explore why kindergartens offer more for moving towards a more all round world than many of our universities. Kindergarten ideally is or can be places where young children live and learn, explore boundaries, in a safe and transparent world without hidden agendas. Kindergartens are places where conflicts emerge everyday and used as a teachable moment. Kindergartens today are multi-cultural places where kids with different backgrounds all come together and get to know each other as they are, not as they are portrayed by others. Kindergartens are places where different generations meet and interact (children, parents and grandparents). There are no dumb questions in kindergarten and there is always time for questions and questioning. The life-world of the child from the starting point for learning and not disciplinary problems Research on pre-school children and learning has stated that children are playing learning individuals, and if education should learn from children an integration of play and learning into a wholeness would be on the agenda for a goal directed preschool.

Teachers seem to experience dilemmas in preschool when they work more systematic and goal directed. For example they find themselves in the cross road between school and preschool, that is, to focus an object of learning (what) or focus the act (how) of learning. They also find themselves in the cross road between utilizing everyday routines or plan activities for children, or in the cross road between play and learning (Pramling & Pramling Samuelsson, manuscript).

### 4. The child and the childhoods in focus for education for all round development

The third arena that we find important in an outline for research on preschool and All round development concerns the preschool child and the preschool childhoods that are to be informed and involved in a global agenda on education for All round development. A clear common message in the perspectives and definitions gathered from different international contexts is that the time line for ESD encompasses several generations and that there is a global perspective. What does this mean in ECE? Does it mean that, from the perspective of the preschool child, concrete encounters with people representing other generations or other parts of the world are arranged? As we see it, this is not what it is about. Rather we interpret this in terms of infusing a

perspective in education, unbounded by time and space. This means not only seeing each child's education in a long time perspective, but also an ambition to use content in the education that make children aware of time and history, as well as places and geography related, of course, to what is possible to grasp for a preschool child. As we see it, such an approach does not only make a relevant base in education for All round development, but it may also be seen as a step to create a sense of connection for the child. Such a sense of connection, of being part of something that stretches further than the own person, is as we see it, a necessary prerequisite in learning for All round development.

Children have to work on what is close to them and what is here and now, but this does not mean that their attention cannot be directed towards a global society. Media and travelling contributes with more information about "the other" and other childhoods today than ever. The global society means that toys, clothes and food are produced all over the world, "the net-work society" affects not only adults but also children. Children quite early in life can see what is most appropriate in different situations and cultures (Siraj-Blachford, manuscript). This is the situation that form the challenge for ambitions to teach children about All round development and to give them inspiration and competence for citizenship, here and now and in the future. Ethical questions are as important as knowledge about environmental issues in this project.

### 5.1 Principles of 'Child-Centered Education' that develops independence and self-reliance

One of the educational aims during early childhood is to develop independence and self-reliance. In this context, 'independence' refers to the ability to think without needing to follow instructions. Therefore, independent children can make their own judgments and achieve tasks after a continuous process of trial and error. However this does not mean that they simply behave selfishly without considering others in any way. Independent children are able to make their own decisions after considering many relevant factors, such as other people or the surrounding situation, but they are not controlled by any 'authority'. So, how should early childhood educators behave towards children in order to develop independence? Firstly, they have to attach importance to the *voluntariness* of children (e.g. their own ideas, will and plans). However, if teachers leave children to do as they like, they will not develop. The task of teachers is to see whether children can achieve self-realization. Teachers have to discuss and drop hints to help children when they are stuck or lose interest in their play. In other words, well-thought-out educational interventions are necessary.

### 5.2 Respect the pace of development of each child

It seems that the crucial point in early childhood education is that it is rooted in, and also fulfills the life of, the children. It is fundamental that teachers to prepare for a variety of possible activities so that children can get started on what they are most interested in doing, and can develop that activity. In other words, children themselves decide what they do - teachers do not just introduce "activities of the day" based on detailed plans. Therefore, there will be as many curricula and timetables of activities as there are children. Teachers should keep a close watch on each child, join in their play, and assist or make an educational intervention when necessary. They should assess the development stage of each child and give assistance so that s/he can take a new step forward.

### 5.3 'Zone of Proximal Development'

Vygotsky's concept, 'Zone of Proximal Development'(ZPD) can assist the teacher to recognize individual differences in development and identify the development level of a particular child. The zone of proximal development refers to the 'possible level' that children can achieve under adult guidance. This shows the distance between the actual developmental level that children have already achieved, and the level of potential development. The teacher should act as a 'scaffold', providing the minimum support necessary for a child to succeed and take a step up to the next level. So, how can teachers identify the zone of proximal development of each child?

Three points are important: teachers' previous experiences, the child's ability to imitate, and his/her life history.

**5.4 Teachers' previous experiences** help teachers them to assess how they should speak to, and to what extent they should help, a child. For instance, they may think, "This boy is just like the one I took care of before. It takes some time for him to get started, but once he starts, I'm sure he can accomplish this task by himself because he has ability to

concentrate, like a boy I helped last year". Teachers can assume the zone of proximal development of the child based on such previous experience. It is better to avoid giving too many hints or instructions to a child. Drop a small hint at the beginning of a task, and change the way you speak to the child until s/he can go to the next step.

**i. Imitation** is another aspect of the zone of proximal development. If children are able to imitate how teachers and/or peers achieve a task, they will nearly be able to complete the same task on their own. Taken together, a teacher's previous experience and a child's ability to imitate provide a stronger indication of the zone of proximal development.

**ii. Life History** helps a teacher to assess developmental potential and think about how to behave towards particular children. But do not compare one child's life history directly with that of another child. Compare a child's present situation with similar situations in their own past experience. All children can take a step forward if the teacher knows their life histories and strong/weak points, and then acts as a scaffold.

### iii. Develop child independence

Early childhood educators have the following roles.

Firstly, to evaluate the development level of each child, and decide how to aid and understand what he/she desires or thinks immediately. Secondly, to provide a physical and psychological environment appropriate for child development. Thirdly, to help children widen their activities and develop their ideas and the ability to think. In order to fulfill those roles, teachers should consider carefully: (1) how they provide a good environment (i.e. prepare appropriate materials so that children can develop through daily activities), (2) how they establish human relationships in the class (i.e. develop a reciprocal and cooperative relationship), (3) how they speak to children (i.e. use words and expressions appropriate for their development level and give small hints rather than give instructions).

## 6. Principles of Child Development and Learning

- All areas of development and learning are important.
- Learning and development follow sequences.
- Development and learning proceed at varying rates.
- Development and learning result from an interaction of maturation and experience.
- Early experiences have profound effects on development and learning.
- Development proceeds toward greater complexity, self-regulation, and symbolic or representational capacities.
- Children develop best when they have secure relationships.
- Development and learning occur in and are influenced by multiple social and cultural contexts.
- Children learn in a variety of ways.
- Play is an important vehicle for developing self-regulation and promoting language, cognition, and social competence.
- Development and learning advance when children are challenged.
- Children's experiences shape their motivation and approaches to learning.

## 7. CONCLUSION:

We have suggested that research on early childhood education and All round development need to consider at least three arenas for inquiry: the preschool as an educational institution and its relation to the educational system as well as to the society at large; the pedagogical practice in preschool, its traditions and challenges in terms of curricula and professional training; issues related to what child and what childhoods we have in mind when making education for All round development a reality. Far from a complete agenda for concrete research, this preliminary outline will serve as one step forward in the planning. Hopefully our sketchy notions have contributed to reflections and questions also among others, on young children and their role in the global work for all round development.

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