

**What future for the relationship between early childhood  
education and care and compulsory schooling?**

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### **Abstract**

The relationship between early childhood education and care and compulsory schooling is the subject of increasing research and policy attention, as attendance at both grows globally, the discourse of lifelong learning emphasises that learning begins at birth, and as investment in early childhood is increasingly advocated for the returns it brings in later education. Having discussed the structural and cultural framework that contextualises the relationship, the article considers four possible types of relationship: preparing the child for school, stand off, making the school ready for children, and the vision of a meeting place. It concludes by a discussion of some critical questions and of how the relationship between early childhood and compulsory school should not be confined only to the first few school grades: full resolution requires inclusion of secondary education.

The relationship between early childhood education and care (ECEC) and compulsory education (CS) – pre-school and school – is intensifying and increasingly under the research and policy spotlight. This article examines some of the possibilities, actual and potential, for this relationship. In doing so, it maps a terrain of choice available to societies, choices which, it will become apparent, raise fundamental questions about the child, educational institutions and the concept of education.

While attention will be focused on richer countries, broadly those who are member states of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the issues are not irrelevant to other countries and are likely to become more so as they expand and develop their education services. More children (86 per cent) than ever before now have access to Grade 1 in primary school, with increases in access between 1999 and 2004 most marked in sub-Saharan Africa (from 55 to 65 per cent) and South and West Asia (from 77 to 86 per cent) (Neuman 2007). At the same time early childhood education and care services are also increasing and will continue to do so. General Comment 7, by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (2005), proffers guidance to States parties on rights in early childhood under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Not only does it emphasise the Convention's recognition of the right to education, with primary education made compulsory and available free to all (art. 28); it also interprets the right to education during early childhood as beginning at birth and closely linked to young children's right to maximum development (art. 6.2).

### **The intensifying relationship**

Three connected developments are intensifying the relationship between early childhood education and care and compulsory schooling and placing it increasingly under the policy spotlight. First, there is the growth and current extent of ECEC services, especially for children in the 2 to 3 years before compulsory school age.

By 2000, most children living in OECD countries (which are among the richest in the world) spent at least two years in early childhood

education and care settings before beginning primary school (OECD, 2001). But growth in ECEC is now a global trend. Global estimates suggest that enrolment in pre-primary programmes increased by 11 per cent during the five years up to 2004, by which time 124 million young children were attending some form of ECEC before starting school (Woodhead 2007a: 8)

At the same time, the apparent benefits of attendance at ECEC services have been highlighted and brought to the attention of policy makers. The globalised discourse of lifelong learning emphasises that learning begins at birth, rather than at some later date coinciding with school entry age; early childhood is “an important phase for developing important dispositions and attitudes towards learning” (OEC 2001: 128). While a body of research argues a relationship between ECEC attendance and later school performance, often qualified by the need for the former to meet certain normative standards: “good quality childcare and early education, as well as home learning, gives children a head start in primary school, by supporting better behaviour and educational development” (Department for Children, Schools and Families (England) 2008: 9).

Economists have also asserted that the most productive form of educational investment, bearing the best returns, is to be made in children below compulsory school age; for example, the work of James Heckman has been widely quoted, with its conclusion that, viewed purely as an economic development strategy, the return on investment to the public of early childhood development programmes “far exceeds the return on most projects that are currently funded as economic development,” (Heckman and Masterov, 2004) and represents a better return than investment in later stages of education. At a time of growing global competition, ECEC services have been recruited to national survival strategies, in the belief they have a vital role to play in producing the flexible workforce of the future (Fendler 2001).

In these circumstances, it is perhaps not surprising that the first report of OECD’s major cross-national thematic review of early childhood education

and care (referred to below as 'the OECD review') notes a "welcome trend towards increased co-operation between ECEC and the school system in terms of both policy and practice" and offers as one of the review's policy lessons the need for "a strong and equal partnership (of ECEC) with the education system" (OECD 2001: 128). The way this policy lesson is expressed in the OECD review highlights that the ECEC/CS relationship is not just a matter of proximity, but also of power. A close and strong partnership may not necessarily be an equal one, in particular given the gravitational pull of the compulsory school, established for many years and a central institution in modern nation states: the partnership can bring benefits, but it may also entail dangers. The report notes that despite positive signs of closer cooperation, "there is a risk that increased co-operation between schools and ECEC could lead to a school-like approach to the organisation of early childhood provision", adding that such downward pressure by school on ECEC may lead the latter "to adopt the content and methods of the primary school", with a "detrimental effect on young children's learning" (ibid.: 129). So stronger co-operation with schools is to be welcomed - but only as long as ECEC is "viewed not only as a preparation for the next stage of education...but also as a distinctive period where children live out their own lives" and if "the specific character and traditions of quality early childhood practice are preserved".

Below, I shall explore the relationship of subordination, the downward pressure of CS on ECEC, in more detail, referred to as 'schoolification' in the final report of the OECD review (OECD 2006). Alongside, I will consider three other possible ECEC/CS relationships. But before doing that, it is important to recognise the considerable diversity between countries in the context that frames the relationship, and which may play a part in shaping it.

### **The structural and cultural context**

As already noted, most OECD member states now provide extensive, and often universal, ECEC provision for children in the 2-3 years preceding compulsory schooling. For most children, therefore, transition to compulsory school is no longer from home, but involves a transition from

one institution to another. However, children's institutional experience before compulsory school varies considerably between countries, affecting the relationship and transition between ECEC and CS.

In some cases the experience will be in a pre-primary school within the education system, sometimes sharing a building or campus with a primary school and usually attended for 2 or 3 years prior to transition. In other cases, the experience will be in some form of non-school setting (e.g. nursery, kindergarten, pre-school), and the child may have been in this setting since 12 months of age or even earlier. Not only do different national systems produce different pre-school experiences for children; the age at which they move into primary school varies considerably between countries. In most OECD countries, compulsory school age is 6; but in a few cases it is 5 (e.g. Netherlands, the UK) or 7 (e.g. Denmark, Sweden). Moreover in some countries, parents may choose to start their children at primary school before compulsory school age, between 4 and 5 in Ireland, Netherlands and the UK, and at 6 in Denmark and Sweden.

Nor is the environment into which children move when they enter primary school uniform, either between schools or between countries. For example, class sizes vary. The average across OECD member states is 21.4 children per class, with 16-21 students per class in most countries. But the average is over 24 in Japan, Korea, Turkey and the United Kingdom. Similarly, the length of the school day varies. The OECD average for 7-8 year olds is 758 hours a year of 'instruction time', but this ranges from 530 hours in Finland to 981 hours in Australia (OECD 2006a, b).

The cumulative effect of these structural differences can be considerable, for example comparing the cases of Denmark and France. A Danish child will usually have entered the ECEC system between 1 and 2 years of age. Compulsory school age is 7, though most Danish children enter school at 6 on a voluntary basis, moving from a kindergarten or age-integrated centre, which is the responsibility of the welfare system and staffed mainly by pedagogues, qualified at degree level but a separate profession

to teachers. The average child:staff ratio in these centres is 7.2:1. The first year at school is in a 'kindergarten class', staffed by pedagogues rather than teachers, whose work is guided by a very brief set of curriculum guidelines. Moving up to the first year of compulsory school, at 7, children attend for around 20 hours a week, and are likely to spend more of their day in free-time services, again with pedagogues.

A French child, by contrast, will have attended one type of school – the *école maternelle* – from around 3 years of age, where the average child:staff ratio is 25.5:1. Compulsory school age is 6, and children then move straight into another school, the *école élémentaire*, attending for about 35 hours a week. In both types of school, she will be with teachers and subject to a detailed curriculum. Continuity is emphasised by the last year of *école maternelle* and the first two years of *école élémentaire* being considered part of the same 'learning cycle', and a common training for teachers working in both types of school.

As well as such structural features, the institutions children attend before and after transition to school may have very different cultures, expressed in different understandings (of purpose, of the child and worker, of learning) and practices. Bennett (2006), for example, has distinguished in ECEC systems between what he terms the 'pre-primary education' and the 'Nordic pedagogical' tradition. In the former case, of which France is an example, children attend schools which "are understood as a place for learning and instruction. Each child is expected by the final year to have reached pre-defined levels of learning in subject areas useful for school." While in the latter case, exemplified by Denmark, "the early childhood centre is viewed as a life space, a place in which children and pedagogues 'learn to be, learn to do, learn to learn, learn to live together'". This fundamental difference of orientation is reflected in other key areas: curriculum (detailed prescription, or short framework); learning (focus on learning and skills in areas useful for school with clear and mainly cognitive learning goals, or a focus on broad developmental goals and a holistic approach); methods of working; and the education and concept of the professional worker (teacher or pedagogue).

ECEC in both France and Denmark might be described as strong systems, in that both offer a near universal service over a period of at least 3 years and both have a professionalised workforce. However, the relationship with CS is likely to be very different since they diverge in how far ECEC shares culture with CS: not much in the case of Denmark, a lot in France. In yet other countries, notably most English-speaking countries, the relationship will be shaped by relatively weak ECEC systems, with school-based services (kindergarten or nursery classes) offering relatively small amounts of pre-primary education that has much in common with CS.

### **Four possible relationships**

In this section I outline four relationships between ECEC and CS. I offer them as ideal types, though some at least approximate to the situation to be found in particular countries. Nor do I suggest that this is an exhaustive typology of relationships; others may exist or might be imagined.

#### *Preparing the child for school*

In this relationship, the compulsory school is the clear and unquestioned dominant partner, and the task of the ECEC system is defined as ensuring the child is readied for the requirements of the school system. The former must align itself with the latter so as to successfully prepare children for the school and its long-established culture. Another way of expressing this relationship is 'readiness for school', ensuring the child is fit for purpose when the time comes for compulsory education. Kagan (2007: 16) has outlined both the history of the concept and the variants of its meaning:

From its earliest use, the word 'readiness' has amassed scores of different meanings, provoked legions of debates, and confused parents and teachers (Kagan, 1990). It appeared in print in the 1920s, with two constructs vying for prominence – readiness for learning and readiness for school. Advanced by developmentalists, readiness for learning was regarded as the level of development at which the individual has the capacity to undertake the learning of



specific material – interpreted as the age at which the average group of individuals has acquired the specified capacity...

Readiness for school is a more finite construct, embracing specific cognitive and linguistic skills (such as identifying colours, distinguishing a triangle from a square). Irrespective of academic domain, school readiness typically sanctions standards of physical, intellectual and social development sufficient to enable children to fulfil school requirements.

Whatever the definition employed, preparation or readiness for school presumes the school has fixed standards that children need to be able to achieve prior to entry; the task of ECEC services is to deliver children able to meet those standards. As the final report of the OECD thematic review observes “the ‘readiness for school’ model is a powerful one, as it is carried by American (English-language) research to all countries. It holds out the promise to education ministries of children entering primary school already prepared to read and write, and being able to conform to normal classroom procedures” (OECD 2006a: 63). This relationship comes closest to the idea of ‘schoolification’, with its implications of ECEC services increasingly colonised by and resourcing the compulsory school, to serve its needs and interests.

### *Stand off*

The culture of some ECEC systems is very different to the school; indeed the services and practitioners of these systems may define their identity in part in opposition to the school, foregrounding their distinct ideas and practices. Here the ECEC/CS relationship may be marked by suspicion and some degree of antagonism, the ECEC seeking to defend itself and its children from what it may discern as a narrowly didactic approach to education that it sees as typical of the school. This relationship may be most apparent where ECEC has a strong pedagogical tradition, with its attention to education in its broadest sense (a concept discussed further below), treating education, care and upbringing as inseparable parts of a holistic approach to work with children.

Denmark is one example of this relationship. Moser has described another, in the tense relationship that has marked relations between ECEC and school in Norway:

The development of kindergarten within Norwegian society was accompanied by both an implicit and an explicit struggle against the traditions associated with school. Mainly this conflict has been – and still is – based on different perspectives on learning and development, children and childhood and, accordingly, different value systems. It has been claimed that the kindergarten and the primary school are founded on different philosophies, organisational models and pedagogical practices and the transition from one to another needs special attention (Moser 2007a: 52).

Norwegian policy documents still support a clear distinction between kindergarten and primary school as quite different pedagogical institutions. For example, the 2006 Kindergarten Act

offers an understanding of the concept of learning very different from a traditional school-based concept. The law emphasises that:

... kindergartens shall nurture children's curiosity, creativity and desire to learn and offer challenges based on the children's interests, knowledge and skills.

This expresses an understanding of learning which is neither focused on achievement goals nor mainly controlled by the curriculum. Children are the primary agent of their own learning processes. Kindergartens:

... shall lay a sound foundation for the children's development, lifelong learning and active participation in a democratic society ... [and] shall provide children with opportunities for play, self-expression and meaningful

experiences and activities in safe, yet challenging surroundings (*ibid.*).

Yet at the same time, there are clear signs of an emerging policy goal to reduce these differences and foster a closer partnership between the two institutions of kindergarten and school. The *Norwegian Framework Plan for the content and tasks of kindergartens* expresses this search for commonalities: "Both kindergartens and schools are institutions that provide care, upbringing, play and learning. Children will encounter similarities and differences between these two institutions" (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research (Norway), 2006: 32)

This relationship of stand off does not sit well with the zeitgeist of partnership, and indeed is not likely to be acceptable in current policy discourses. Where it has existed, attempts are underway to change and improve the relationship. But it may retain currency in the minds of some practitioners and some parents, and as such be a continuing source of suspicion and tension.

#### *Making the school ready for children*

A third relationship starts from a more critical questioning of the traditional school, and whether indeed it needs to change its ways, both to better meet the needs of children and in response to a rapidly changing world. The final report of the OECD review starkly states the need for change in compulsory schooling:

Hargreaves (1994), in his critical work on teachers, is at pains to point out that the response of public education systems to this cultural revolution (of globalisation) has been deeply anachronistic. Organisation, curriculum and decision-making in schools continue to resemble 19<sup>th</sup> century patterns: curricula imbued with the certainties of the past, formal testing of discrete skills and knowledge items, and the 'balkanisation' of teachers into separate classrooms and disciplines. The school as an education institution cannot continue in this way (OECD 2006a: 221-222).

Particularly in poorer countries, school readiness implies a need for changes in the most basic material conditions of schools, which makes them impoverished environments for children: large and overcrowded classes, with inadequately trained teachers working with poor methods. School readiness may also imply a lack of responsiveness by schools to the families and communities they serve, leading to “mismatches between the language and culture of home versus school and more general lack of respect for children’s cultural competencies and prior learning” (Woodhead 2007b: 20). The overall effect may be little short of disastrous: “self-perpetuating cycles of failure in which early grades become progressively more overcrowded, teachers demoralised, parents and children disinterested and programmes unable to learn from either failures or successes.”

But in some affluent countries, notably Norway and Sweden, changes to the school have been discussed mainly in terms of pedagogical practice, in particular bringing into the early years of compulsory schooling “some of the main pedagogical strengths of early childhood practice, e.g. attention to the well-being of children, active and experiential learning confidence in children’s learning strategies with avoidance of child measurement and ranking” (Bennett 2006: 20). In Norway, school reforms that reduced the school starting age from 7 to 6 years were accompanied by a discussion of the need for ‘kindergarten pedagogy’ to have greater influence on the school, or at least its early years. The new first grade, for 6 year olds previously in kindergarten, was intended to be significantly different from the ‘traditional’ school pedagogy by mainly being based on ‘kindergarten-pedagogy’; while the four first grades of school should integrate the traditions of both the kindergarten and the school with an emphasis on exploring and learning through play. Teaching should mainly be organised thematically (as in kindergarten) containing elements from different subjects of the school curriculum, becoming more subject-oriented only gradually. The goal of bringing kindergarten pedagogy into school was further emphasised by facilitating kindergarten pedagogues being able to work in the first four grades of school through a short further education –

even though school teachers were not deemed to require further training to work with 6 year olds, despite this age group not forming part of their basic education (Moser 2007b).

A similar intention, of making schools more ready for children through increasing the influence of pre-school pedagogy, has also been apparent in Sweden, again at a time of reform. In 1996, the ECEC system was transferred from the social welfare to the education system. Announcing the transfer, the Swedish Prime Minister Göran Persson

stated that early childhood education and care should be the first step towards realising a vision of lifelong learning. He added that the pre-school should influence at least the early years of compulsory school. Initiatives taken since have sought to build closer links between pre-school, free-time services (school-age child care) and training, treating all as equal parts of the education system (Korpi 2005: 10).

At around the same time as this transfer of responsibility for ECEC, 6 year olds (as in Norway) were being brought into Swedish schools, which were opening 'pre-school classes' staffed by pre-school teachers. Schools were exposed, in their younger age grades at least, to the direct influence of staff educated in pre-school practices and methods, and who were increasingly working as members of teams consisting of pre-school teachers, school teachers and free-time pedagogues (who originally worked separately in free-time services but have now, with free-time services themselves, moved into the school). It could be said that early childhood pedagogy and practitioners were seen as a way of humanising schools and innovating practice, with the intention of creating a better environment for children in the early grades of compulsory education. Whether or not this goal has been achieved, and whether the pre-school class was itself 'schoolified', is a matter for another article.

*The vision of a meeting place*

A fourth relationship starts from the premise that ECEC and CS have often come out of very different traditions, have very different cultures, and that these traditions and cultures are expressed in very different understandings, values and practices. If they are to work more closely together, there must be a better appreciation of difference *and* a collaborative search for new and shared understandings, values and practices, to be achieved through coming together in a pedagogical meeting place, marked by mutual respect, dialogue and co-construction. Put another way, this relationship envisages a strong and equal partnership created by working together on a common project.

This relationship has been explored in a paper by Swedish researchers Gunilla Dahlberg and Hillevi Lenz-Taguchi, which formed part of a 1994 Swedish government committee report *Grunden för livslångt lärande: En barnmogen skola (The foundations for lifelong learning: A child-ready school)*. The paper is titled *Förskola och skola – om två skilda traditioner och om visionen om en mötesplats (Pre-school and school – two different traditions and the vision of a meeting place)*. The paper and report were written in the context of discussions in Sweden about the relationship between ECEC services (called *förskolan* or 'pre-school'), then in the welfare system, and schools; as noted, pre-schools moved into the education system in 1996.

The paper's dual aim was to explore the cultures of these two institutions and "the pedagogical possibilities and risks involved in an integration of the two types of provision". It goes behind structures to identify and analyse the different traditions and cultures of pre-school and school, which have produced different understandings of the child. For example, the authors argue that the pre-school, strongly influenced by Rousseau and Froebel, has a strong understanding of the child as nature; while for the school, the child is a reproducer of culture and knowledge.

Such constructions in turn are productive of practice. Free play is central to the pre-school practice: "children are to express themselves, their ideas and feelings freely...[It is] about the child's wishes and that it should be

fun at the time, in the here and now". By contrast, the Swedish school (which, Dahlberg and Lenz-Taguchi note, is viewed as "relatively child-centred") has a future orientation and is based on learning concrete subject knowledge. Research shows that "teachers dominate the language interaction in the classroom...The teacher's role is to structure the contents, the activities, the situations, as well as to ask questions and comment on the children's answers...The teacher has the authority and control, while the children are more passive and are expected to do what is expected of them".

Dahlberg and Lenz-Taguchi argue that if pre-schools and schools are to be equal partners in the future, one tradition taking over the other must be avoided – neither schoolification or pre-schoolification. Rather they must work together to create a new and shared understanding of the child, learning and knowledge.

If one wants to achieve a long-term development of the pre-school and school's pedagogical work, then a work of change [must] begin with a common view of the child, learning and knowledge...[T]he view of the child as a constructor of culture and knowledge...a child which takes an active part on the construction of knowledge and is also active in the construction – the creation – of itself through interaction with the environment.

This relationship, in which neither culture takes over the other, envisages coming together in a 'pedagogical meeting place' to create and put into practice a common culture that can form the basis for a strong and equal partnership between ECEC and school.

As far as I know, this paper remains unique in its attempt to analyse the ECEC/CS relationship and to use that analysis to define a strategy based on encounter and dialogue for tackling what might appear an incommensurable relationship. There is, however, a hint of the same way of thinking in the concluding section of the final report on the OECD review; having argued that schools cannot continue in their traditional

ways, an idea of education and learning is proposed that could link ECEC and CS, without either dominating:

Knowledge is inter-disciplinary and increasingly produced in small networks. In the future it will be constructed through personal investigation, exchange and discussion with many sources, and co-constructed in communities of learning characterised by team teaching. This approach to knowledge can begin in early childhood and, in fact, fits well with the child's natural learning strategies, which are fundamentally enquiry based and social (OECD 2006a: 222).

### **Discussion**

Rethinking the relationship between early childhood education and care and compulsory school offers an important opportunity to define critical questions and to seek answers that might apply across the childhood spectrum, indeed even across the life course. The Dahlberg/Lenz Taguchi paper provides some examples of such questions. What is our image of the child? What is learning? Others include: What is education? What is our image of the (pre)school? Who is the educator?

The Norwegian policy, quoted above, that refers to both kindergartens and schools providing "care, upbringing, play and learning" opens up to a concept of what has been termed 'education in its broadest sense'.

a broad concept that understands education as fostering and supporting the general well-being and development of children and young people, and their ability to interact effectively with their environment and to live a good life: education as a process of upbringing and increasing participation in the wider society. This might be termed 'education-in-its-broadest sense', similar in many respects to the Continental concept and tradition of social pedagogy. This concept might be contrasted with another, 'education-in-its-narrower sense', that is focused on schooling and



other kinds of formal learning, and is closer to the way education is often understood today (Moss and Haydon, in press).

'Care', in this understanding, is an integral part of education, perhaps best viewed as an ethic, a way of thinking and relating to others (Dahlberg and Moss 2005). Rather than debating how and when a subject-oriented education might best be introduced, a critical question in some ECEC/CS relationships, this concept of education would be organised around a number of key themes deemed essential to a flourishing life and democratic citizenship, and equally applicable before, during or after compulsory school. A recent example of this approach can be found in the declaration *For a New Public Education System*, prepared for the 40<sup>th</sup> Rosa Sensat Summer School held in Barcelona in July 2005. Section 8 of the Declaration - on 'Curriculum, Knowledge and Learning' - says that "the new public education system organises its contents on the basis of that which is absolutely necessary in order for a person to exercise their citizenship". It proposes that this knowledge can be grouped around six major aims: communication; culture; science and technology; health, environment and sustainable development; citizenship and democracy; creativity, imagination and curiosity (Associació de Mestres Rosa Sensat 2005).

To fully answer this question about the meaning of education, other issues need to be concurrently addressed, for example understandings of knowledge and learning. But the pedagogical meeting place, envisaged by Dahlberg and Lenz Taguchi, can provide a space for such democratic and inclusive deliberation. Indeed this idea of a 'pedagogical meeting place' can also stimulate thinking about a shared image for both pre-school and school. For example, ECEC services and compulsory schools might equally be understood as forums, or places of encounter, for citizens, young and old, in which many projects are possible – social, cultural, ethical, aesthetic, economic and political. Here are just a few of these projects, to give a hint of the potential of these social institutions, definitely not a complete inventory:

- Construction of knowledge, values and identities
- Researching children's learning processes
- Community and group support and empowerment
- Cultural (including linguistic) sustainability and renewal
- Gender equality and economic development
- Democratic and ethical practice

Rather than 'delivering' predetermined 'outcomes', ECEC services and schools can also be understood as collaborative workshops or laboratories, places for experimentation and creation of what Negri and Hardt (2005) term "immaterial production", which includes "the production of ideas, images, knowledge, communication, cooperation, and affective relations... social life itself" (146) – outcomes certainly, but not necessarily predetermined or predictable. This image of the (pre)school as forum and workshop is inscribed with certain fundamental values, including democracy, solidarity, and experimentation (for a fuller discussion of this understanding of ECEC and schools, see Moss 2008).

The educator working in such educational institutions to provide education in its broadest sense would need to be a reflective and democratic practitioner, a critical thinker and researcher, a co-constructor of knowledge and values, a curious border-crosser, and open to being amazed and surprised: "more attentive to creating possibilities than pursuing predefined goals... [to be] removed from the fallacy of certainties, [assuming instead] responsibility to choose, experiment, discuss, reflect and change, focusing on the organisation of opportunities rather than the anxiety of pursuing outcomes, and maintaining in her work the pleasure of amazement and wonder" (Fortunati 2006: 37). The basic education of this educator might involve a combination of generic studies undertaken by all students, whatever the age of children with whom they plan to work once qualified, and more specialist courses, which would enable each student to graduate with a particular profile defining their areas of particular interest and expertise; this has formed the basis of recent reforms in Swedish teacher education, which have brought together within one framework three previous professional

educations – pre-school teachers, school teachers and free-time pedagogues.

Much of the discussion about the relationship between ECEC and CS is focused on just one part of compulsory schooling, the first few grades. The focus is on young children, from 3 (or earlier) to 10 years. Little attention has been devoted to the later stages of compulsory schooling, which in many countries form a separate, secondary stage of the education system. Here schools get larger, education more subject focused, teachers more subject specialist (and male), the project more examination oriented. Looking ahead, it is possible to envisage the current debates about the relationship between early childhood and the first grades of compulsory school being resolved, one way or another, only to be replicated in debates about the relationship between earlier and later compulsory education.

This issue will be least explicit in systems that end up organised around a highly traditional approach to education, centred on a narrow, subject-focused secondary school education; then pre-primary education will prepare children for primary school, which will in turn prepare children for secondary school – and beyond. But the issue will become increasingly apparent if the relationship between ECEC and the early stages of CS leads to change in the latter, influenced by early childhood pedagogy or to the creation of new ideas and practices formed in a pedagogical meeting place. One response to such reforms may be the secondary school bringing pressure to bear for children to be sent to them readied for their particular educational regime. Another response will be to involve and engage secondary education in the innovative and holistic educational regime taking shape for younger children, and to include them in extended pedagogical meeting places.

Such speculative thoughts have been provoked by recent experience of doing research in a school in a Nordic country, which like many other schools in that country now takes children from 1 to 16 years, just under 500 in total (plus a further 65 one to five year olds in two preschools off

the school campus). It is a small, age-integrated institution, organised around team working and a holistic approach that concerns itself with care, learning, health and general well-being and development. The rektor (director) of the school, which had recently been extended to include older children (13 to 16 year olds), posed an important question: what can it mean to be, and what do we want from, a 1-16 school? The answer to this question will provide important clues to answering the question that forms the title for this article: What future for the relationship between early childhood education and care and compulsory schooling?

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