

Difficult balance between play and learning

March 10 2009

If the teacher is not capable of understanding the perspective of six year olds then the child's learning becomes unnecessarily difficult, or in some cases the child's interest in learning may not be aroused at all. This is revealed in a new thesis by Agneta Simeonsdotter Svensson, from the University of Gothenburg, Sweden.

Educational programmes for six year olds became an institutionalised section of the Swedish school system in 1998 under the designation of [preschool class](#), with a syllabus linked to that of after-school centres and junior schools.

The main emphasis in the preschool class is educational circle time. It is there that the day's activities, themes and topics are linked together and integrated into a whole.

Circle time is central; it's where a lot happens in terms of the interplay between [children](#) and adults and between the children. It should also be a place where the different perspectives of the children and the teacher meet, but on many occasions it is the adult's arena, says Agneta Simeonsdotter Svensson.

In her thesis she has conducted video observation of children and teachers in 15 preschool classes and interviewed 115 six year olds.

The steering document for the preschool class specifies that play is an essential constituent in active learning. In practice, this has turned out to be difficult to implement in relation to the children's perspective.

It entails being aware of how children reason when they are facing a task that they feel is difficult, and stimulating children to cope with challenges and dare to overcome obstacles. However, in my research many children perceive themselves as obstacles, says Agneta Simeonsdotter Svensson.

Her analysis shows that teachers often find it difficult to put the steering document into practice in terms of the children's perspective. A method of working that is highly influenced by practice in schools is allowed to dominate in the preschool class, where preschool teachers are the predominant occupational group represented in the research.

The tasks that the children work on are presented in a way that on many occasions does not arouse their interest or the children do not understand how to perform the task. Furthermore, when the children are working on tasks that are designed to prepare them for school or if they feel the task to be difficult, the teachers engage in less communication with the children on how to implement them.

A lot is taken for granted. It often concerns tasks that are part of a theme on which the children are working. The six year olds are not treated on the basis of their way of seeing, thinking and reflecting, rather they are simply given instructions. Teachers are not always capable of explaining the tasks that are designed to prepare the children for school, for example by asking the child what he or she is thinking in relation to the situation. Participation by the children in the interplay is thus given less space, says Agneta Simeonsdotter Svensson.

Source: University of Gothenburg

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