Challenges in starting school in Iceland

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Overview

- Context – educational policy in Iceland
- Challanges in transitions
- Research
- Implications for policy and practice

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Where is Iceland?

Population of 330.000

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The Icelandic educational system

- The first level, preschool (playschool), is intended for children six years and younger
  - One integrated system bringing together education and care
- The second level, compulsory school, for children from 6 to 16 years
- The third level, upper-secondary school, for 16 to 20 years
- The fourth level, higher education, from 20 years

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Early school start

- Preschool is defined as the first level of schooling (since 1994)
- All children have the right to preschool education
- Preschool is neither obligatory nor free of charge

- 9 months parental leave

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Attendance in preschools

	2000	**2013**
One year old	0%	→ 34% (41.2% 2014)
Two years old	55%	→ 94%
Three years old	87%	→ 96%
Four years old	94%	→ 97%
Five years old	93%	→ 94%

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Cost – what do parents pay

- The municipalities run the preschools and parent pay about 1/3 of the cost
- A monthly payment for 8 hours a day per child (meals included) is about 270-400 AUD
- Groups that get discount: students, single parents and families in severe social situations

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Teacher education

- A five year university education
- Teachers in pre- and primary schools get similar salaries
- Preschool teachers were 33.3% of staff working in preschools

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Fundamental pillars

- Health and welfare
- Democracy and human rights
- Equality
- Creativity
- Sustainability
- Literacy

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Issues of concern

- Implementation of the pillars as a tool to create continuity is complex
  - How are equality and social justice in transition between school levels addressed in practice?
- Increasing number of:
  - One to two year olds in preschool
  - Families with different national background

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Conflicting discourses

- Various understanding of the educational system
  - How care, play and learning is visualised in the context of preschool
  - "Schoolification" of preschool
- Pre- and primary school teachers tend to have different views about children and their learning (Einarsdóttir, 2007)

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Children's perspectives

- Play with peers is important and provides learning opportunities
- Support from educators (Pálmadóttir & Einarsdóttir, 2012, 2015; Karlsdóttir & Perry, in press)

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Changing practice

- How can this be done?
- Collaboration between university and 9 preschools in one municipality
- Assessment of learning and wellbeing (Karlsdóttir 2015)

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Action research projects

- Several action research, with the aim to address the implementation of policy
- Teachers exploring and developing their practice in collaborations with university teachers

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Examples of action research projects

– Through reflection and collaboration teachers views changed, towards seeing children as competent (Jónsdóttir & Pálmadóttir, 2008)

– Creating continuity, between school levels, in mathematics (Garðarsdótttir & Pálsdóttir, 2010)

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Education for preschool teachers

• Changes in the teacher education

• 5 years university education

• Emphasis on students' becoming:
  – Professional leaders
  – Using action research to create a learning community in collaboration between the university and the field

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Continuity in lives of children

- Child−centred and play-based learning experience is important in transition
- Children should attend quality education built on „good" research
  - Various perspectives
- Changing policy into practice takes time and educators need support from authorities for implementation (Einarsdóttir, 2013)

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Thank you

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