Early Years Transition Programme

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Early Years Transition Programme

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Executive Summary

The Project aimed to improve the quality of education and children’s learning in pre-schools and primary schools to facilitate the transition process for children (aged 5-7) and their families as well as to help both educational institutions to connect and to collaborate more effectively. The Project focused on children’s participation and encouragement of knowledge acquisition through Language Practice and Early Literacy. The overall goal was to enable pre-school teachers and primary school teachers to find a more unified approach to learning and a common understanding of education that should be adopted at both educational levels to reinforce educational continuity and thus enhance teaching and learning in the early years’ classrooms.

Project Objectives

The aim of the EASE Project, was to conceive a joint Educational Transition Course in initial education and in-service training for EC and Grade 1 teachers that ensures successful transition within a rights-based, socio-constructivist approach, and that incorporates the four Headline Project Objectives:

1. to maximize cooperation between the EC sector and primary school and thus facilitate the transition
2. to promote the involvement and exchange of views between parents and professionals in both sectors
3. to develop connecting curricula in early literacy and language practice within a play-oriented and participatory approach
4. to assess children’s literacy learning and thus encourage them to reflect on their own learning processes and to empower them to become autonomous learners

The focus and aims of the EASE Project:
Outcome and results

The main aim of the project thus was to improve the initial education and in-service training of pre- and primary teachers in relation to the transition from pre- to primary school. Therefore, the main outputs were:

- EASE Overview of the national organisation of early education and early primary services
- EASE aims in form of a bookmark in all national languages
- EASE national course descriptions of initial- and in-service training
- EASE internal evaluation tool – in- and out questionnaire
- EASE adaptation of the learning-story approach (M. Carr)
- EASE Context and Literacy Indicators in all national languages
- EASE Guideline for courses on Educational Transition
- EASE Compendium
- EASE leaflets with abstracts

The material was published by various means, including: print and web-based publications, a web-based databank including all relevant material produced in the participating countries and abroad as well as the material produced by the project.

In general, the project has prompted changes in teacher education and risen awareness of the impact of the approach on all short-term and long-term target groups.

There are two principal websites:

a freely accessible site: www.EASE-EU.com and.

a password-protected site: http://internal.ease.eu.com/
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1. Project Objectives

Research suggests (OECD 2001, 2006) that a more unified approach to learning should be adopted in both the early childhood education and the primary school systems, and that attention should be given to transition challenges faced by young children as they enter school. Transitions for children are generally a stimulus to growth and development, but if too abrupt and handled without care, they represent the risk of regression and failure, particularly for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The project therefore aimed at enabling pre-school teachers and primary school teachers to find a more unified approach to learning and a common understanding of education that should be adopted at both educational levels to collaborate more effectively, i.e. to improve educational continuity and thus facilitate the transition process of children (aged 5-7) and their families.

The pedagogical approach was built on the strengths of the "school readiness" approach and the "social pedagogy" tradition, bringing together concepts of care, nurture, and education. Children's development was stimulated by learning experiences and guided participation. Adults and peers nurtured their learning and development.

On the basis of the didactic concepts of the EC sector and primary school, common education concepts were developed in order to initiate effective co-operation at both educational levels. Teaching material in early literacy for co-operative teaching was conceived, tested and implemented. This promoted an exchange of views of all involved in the educational process and documented the individual pathways of each child at the beginning of lifelong learning.

Early literacy and language practice were assessed by applying the EASE adaptation of the learning-story approach by M.Carr. The child was involved in progressively more complex patterns of reciprocal activity and by gradual shifts in the balance of power from the teacher to the learner. These shifts reflected children's ability and inclination to set their own goals, reflect on their own learning process - (meta-cognition) and thus take on some of the responsibility for learning.

This approach embraced a view of learning that focused on the relationship between the learner and the environment, and sought ways to document complex reciprocal and responsive relationships in that environment. Children’s learning dispositions and the competences acquired by the children and the strategies they have applied in acquiring them were central. This approach was seen as paving the way to more individualised learning where the child was seen as a capable and competent learner.

The project, firstly aimed at increasing equity, quality and effectiveness during the crucial transition phase from pre-school to compulsory school, and secondly at enriching the education and training systems for pre- and primary school teachers through an additional qualification course in „Educational Transition“ to ensure coherence and continuity in pedagogical approaches.

Reinforced motivation to learn and a variety of learning opportunities, embedded in responsive, reciprocal approaches, were the ultimate keys to implementing lifelong learning successfully for all target groups.
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2. Project Approach

On the basis of the didactic concepts of the EC sector and primary school, joint education concepts were developed by teacher trainees and or professionals of both sectors in order to initiate effective co-operation at both educational levels. Teaching materials in early literacy for co-operative teaching were conceived, tested and implemented.

The overarching aim was to promote an exchange of views among all involved in the educational process and to document the individual pathways of each child at the beginning of lifelong learning.

Each of the eight EASE partner countries involved constituted so-called local or regional Partnerships consisting of pre- and primary school providers, teacher training colleges, public authorities, teacher pre- and in-service training bodies, schools and institutions.

The national Partnerships organized regular meetings throughout the different phases of the project, as well as during the dissemination phase. They maintained regular contact with the EASE coordinating institution and received support in all EASE relevant issues. These Partnerships were constantly expanded and developed throughout the duration of the project.

All national Partnerships conceptualized initial or in-service Educational Transition courses for the EC and Grade 1 teachers, by incorporating the four EASE objectives:

1. Enhancing the effectiveness of transition through co-construction
   by developing a cooperative approach to and resulting in a common understanding of education that can be adopted at both educational levels
   - Sensitisation - raising awareness for both teachers/trainers and students
   - Curricula framework, guidelines, didactic concepts of the EC sector and primary schools
   - Ecological transition - systems model (Bronfenbrenner)

2. Ensuring roles for the key actors at various levels as a developmental task
   that is the promotion of involvement and exchange of views between children, parents and professionals in both sectors
   - Project management,
   - Co-operative practices with “feeders” (EC sector) and “receivers” (primary school) institutions
   - Co-operative practices with children and parents

3. Developing activities that support learning across the transition process
   that is, developing inter-connecting curricula in early literacy and language practice with a holistic and participatory approach
   - Presentation of examples of successful initiatives and co-operative practices
   - Joint conception of inter-connecting curricula in early literacy in peer-to-peer groups (professionals of the EC sector and primary school)
   - Focus on child’s ability to cope with transition in an active and play-oriented wa
4. Supporting socio-emotional well-being and cognitive achievement
which means assessing children’s literacy competence and thus encouraging them to
reflect on their own learning paths and enabling them to become autonomous learners
throughout life
- EASE adaptation of the learning-stories approach (M.Carr 2001) - a common
base for discussion between institutions (pre-primary and primary) children and
parents
- “Learning how to learn” including meta-cognitive approaches
- Specific support for at-risk children including intercultural education
- Support for gifted children

Project Evaluation

The Consortium agreed to carry out project evaluation involving the four main target groups:
children, parents, EC teachers, Grade 1 teachers.

Children:
the EASE adaptation of the learning-stories approach (M. Carr 2001) provided a
pedagogical documentation to establish a common base for discussion between institutions
children and their parents. This competence-oriented record in narrative form was used to
assess children’s progress related to knowledge building in language and early literacy.

Parents, EC and Grade 1 teachers:
a so-called in- and out questionnaire was administered to parents, educators and primary
school teachers. The aim was to clarify the perceptions of the target groups regarding
successful transition practices. The questions were open-ended allowing the target groups to
express their ideas freely. The questionnaire was administered twice, at the beginning and at
the end of the Project, in order to find out how perceptions had changed.

External evaluation report
The external evaluation report was carried through by Dr. John Bennett, senior OECD
consultant, who took part in all four Consortium meetings and who was in constant contact
with the coordinating institution.
3. Project Outcomes & Results

The EASE consortium has produced all project deliverables foreseen in the project’s application within the deadline and has also reached its planned outcomes. All outcomes and products were structured according to the four Consortium meetings.

From October 2008 to April 2009
In October the first Consortium meeting took place in Copenhagen.
The EASE partners agreed:
- on the four EASE aims
- to contact potential partners to establish the national Partnership and inform them about the aims and planned outcomes of the project
- to submit an initial analysis of the national organization of early education and early primary services
- to apply internal project evaluation involving the four main target groups: children, their parents, EC teachers, Grade 1 teachers
- to apply a valorisation sheet giving evidence of all EASE related project activities
- to submit a draft concept of initial and/or in-service Educational Transition Course for the EC and Grade 1 teachers, by incorporating the four EASE objectives
- during this period, the web page was set up, as well as the online platform for internal project communication and documentation, EASE bookmarks, and EASE roll-ups, EASE notepaper were designed and distributed

Conference presentations, materials and minutes were soon after made available to all.

From May 2009 to January 2010
In May the second Consortium meeting took place in Thessaloniki.
The EASE partners discussed the following papers:
- the final version of the EASE Course Descriptions of the Educational Transition Course
- Good practice examples related both to the training and implementation sectors – interconnecting curricula
- EASE Internal evaluation tool, the in- and out questionnaire including the four target groups
- the valorisation sheet and fruitful dissemination strategies
- the EASE adaptation of the learning story-approach
- It was agreed that each of the eight EASE partner countries shall submit one chapter on the theoretical underpinnings of educational transition for the final EASE Compendium

Conference presentations, materials and minutes were soon after made available to all.
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From January 2010 to August 2010
In January the third Consortium meeting took place in Budapest.
The EASE partners presented their national status quo reports related to:
  • National Partnerships
  • EASE course descriptions
  • EASE adaptation of the learning story-approach
  • EASE internal evaluation tool – in- and out questionnaire
  • chapters for the final EASE Compendium
In preparation for the XXVI OMEP World Congress in Gothenburg 11\textsuperscript{th}-13\textsuperscript{th} August 2010 the Consortium decided:
  • to apply for a self organized EASE presentation with the following countries:
    • Denmark, Germany, Greece, Island and Sweden.
  • to conceive the EASE Compendium as a web-based publication
  • to conceive EASE leaflets with abstracts of the EASE Compendium’s individual chapters
All papers are published on the EASE Project’s website: \url{www.EASE-EU.com}
Please see: Project News, Documentation and Compendium

August 2010 OMEP Congress and final EASE conference
EASE partners from Denmark, Germany Greece, Iceland and Sweden presented their research contributions within the EASE context at the XXVI OMEP World Congress in Gothenburg.
  • Germany: “Introduction to the EASE Project”, Irene Kaschefi-Haude
  • Denmark: “Early Literacy Indicators – A socio-cultural story”, Anders Skriver Jensen, Ole Henrik Hansen, Stig Broström
  • Greece: “Early literacy in transition from preschool to primary school: a comparative view of the practices of preschool and Grade 1 teachers”, Kalliopi Vrinioti & Irene Sivropoulou
  • Iceland: “Sharing Paths”, Johanna Einhardsdottir
  • Sweden: “To transfer “learning stories” into literacy didactics, Elisabeth Mellgren & Ingrid Pramling Samuelsson
  • Sweden: “A seamless transition or an oasis to rest in?” Helena Ackesjö
All contributions are published on the EASE Project’s website: \url{www.EASE-EU.com}
Please see: Project News and Documentation
Further International Dissemination activities by EASE Consortium members:

XXIV CESE Conference 16 – 19 August 2010 Uppsala, Sweden
by Dr. Kalliopi Vrinioti

20th EECERA Conference, Birmingham UK 6th-8th September 2010
Prof. Jóhanna Einarsdóttir and Dr. Stig Broström

EASE Certificate Guideline
Cooperative transition practices –
from pre-school to primary school –
EASE Early Years Transition Programme
(“Kooperative Übergangsgestaltung von der Kindertagesstätte in die Grundschule - EASE
Early Years Transition Programme”)
The EU-Agency conceived this guideline for the use of pre-school training colleges
(vocational schools) wanting to implement the Educational Transition Course in their school
programmes. The guideline was approved by the Ministry of Education in North-Rhine
Westphalia and all five local governments in North-Rhine Westphalia.
4. Partnerships

In the eight EASE partners countries there is a big variation in terms of their geographical location, social and political and social history, cultural traditions and pedagogical approaches. Influenced also by varying family, employment and education policies. All this resulted in distinctly diverse patterns of early childhood and primary education that have emerged across Europe.

The professional study routes for core staff also vary considerably, especially in initial education/training for the early childhood field is low in some partner countries, e.g. Austria and Germany. There is currently a good deal of campaigning for upgrading to a tertiary-level requirement in alignment with school teachers. (P. Oberhuemer, 2010)

The EASE Project offered an excellent opportunity to learn from one another, in the early childhood field as well in the primary education. Of all continents, we in Europe have the longest, most theorised and most successful early childhood sector (OECD 2001, 2006), yet, not all European countries reach the targeted levels of access and quality seen, for example, in the Nordic countries.

In early education, the European heritage of is also threatened. Holistic development goals and a pedagogy of care, nurturing and broad education are being replaced with an approach that is “narrow and atomising, calculating and contractual, instrumental and technical” (Moss, 2009). Rather than respecting the child’s learning strategies, in particular play and self-directed meaning-making, teachers are being trained to instruct and to understand learning as transmission or transfer of knowledge.

The EASE Project brought a broad cross-section of countries together to dialogue and reflect on best practices in each country. This valuable forum provided participants with an opportunity to discuss critically the transition from kindergarten to school and to co-construct new knowledge. We reflected together on: comparative curriculum features through out the participating countries; early literacy; how young children learn and assimilate language; teacher training to support children’s learning; learning-stories as a means of evaluation; and parental involvement.

EASE - European and National Partnerships

The eight partner countries worked in national Partnerships, i.e. educational staff training institutions, in cooperation with pre-schools and primary schools.

The teaching materials in early literacy for co-operative teaching, conceived by each partner were implemented in the “feeders” (day-care centres), and “receivers” (primary schools), evaluated and finally integrated into the institution’s programme.

The process of creating national Partnerships was useful. It helped partners identify key players in the field and was a first step towards creating synergies between individual actions performed by the players. The EASE Partners involved their national partners in every step of the project through written or face to face consultation. In addition, the national Partners also mentioned that the project’s approach of creating new structures to deal with new contents helped them to overcome existing barriers and to work together with new contents helped them to overcome existing barriers and to work together with institutions and people with whom there was only reduced cooperation until the EASE Project.

The constant dialogue between the national and the European level and the fact that the project had a two-way top-down and bottom-up strategy was identified by all people involved as the most significant added value of EASE Project.
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The most essential component of the efficient EASE Partnership was a positive working relationship based on mutual trust and respect.

Throughout the project, within our workshops, conferences and dissemination activities, we, as the Consortium, experienced enriching cultural and intellectual interactions which will have sustainable influence on our professional lives.

Presentation of Inter-Professional Cooperation of Pre- and Primary School Teachers

EASE Certificate Award

Pre- and primary school teachers present their interconnecting early literacy projects to pre-and primary teacher trainers, representatives of school boards, day care providers, parents and core staff of kindergartens and schools in Cologne
4. Plans for the Future

The EASE Project developed an innovative approach towards the issue of pre-school and primary school education and initial and in-service training for students and professionals and the aim of changing and influencing its structures.

National level
The participating educational institutions in Austria, Denmark, Hungary, Iceland, Greece, Poland and Germany, including five vocational colleges have implemented the course Transitional Education in their study programmes.
According to the valorization plan each EASE Consortium member has disseminated the national EASE results to:
- members of parliaments
- Ministries of Education, and Ministries of Social/Youth Affairs,
- regional governments
- politicians on local, regional and federal levels,
- educational staff training institutions, public and private sectors
- university boards, school boards,
- trade unions, associations of parents and teachers, language associations
- international institutes of educational research
- State Institutes of Early Childhood Research

By enlarging the national Partnerships and involving more and more educational institutions and teachers in initial training and in-service education institutions, schools and administrative authorities, it has been possible to give perspectives for changing national teacher education programmes and examination standards and thus promote awareness for a shared understanding of the child's learning in order to create a strong and equal partnership between preschool and primary schooling.

Transnational level
The EASE Compendium was made available to a large audience at the OMEP (Organisation Mondiale de l'Education Préscolaire) in Gothenburg in August 2010, the XXIV CESE Conference (Comparative Society Education in Europe) in Upsala August 2010 and the 20th EECERA Conference,( Early Childhood Education Research Association) in Birmingham in September 2010.
Since then a fair number of inquiries for further information and good practice examples have reached the EASE Consortium and will probably do in future.

The EASE Consortium will continue to promote the EASE results in a way to safeguard coherence and continuity in pedagogical approaches and promote effective transition and greater equity and efficiency in learning in the pre-and primary sector. The initial education and in-service training of pre- and primary school teachers will be upgraded by an additional qualification in Early Literacy to respond both to changes and expectations in our knowledge-based economy and society.

Furthermore the EASE results will be disseminated by all EASE Partners in national pre- and primary teacher conferences and symposia taking place after the eligibility of the project. The EASE project will also have influence beyond the participants themselves. National Partnership members are preparing articles in the educational journals and periodicals which are to appear in the next time to come.
6. Contribution to EU policies

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child established the framework of philosophy of education in the EASE Project. The Convention’s distinguishing feature is its new view of the child. The Convention’s three key principles are: a) non-discrimination of children, b) children’s right to development, and c) children’s right to participation. “Empowerment” as the basic right of the child, means strengthening the children’s position so that they may experience their dignity and rights while learning and developing. This is evident in the EASE front page’s motto: “The education of the child shall be directed to...the development of the child’s personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential.” United Nation’s Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989

www.EASE-EU.com

The Bologna Process aimed to establish a common framework for academic qualification across the higher education systems in Europe by 2010, has had a significant impact on the restructuring of study routes in general, including those for prospective pre- and primary school teachers.

The Lisbon Conclusions prescribe three main objectives for Europe’s education and training systems: “the development of local learning centres, the promotion of new basic skills, in particular in the information technologies and increased transparency of qualifications” (Council, 2000, pp. 12ff.). The overall aim is of becoming “(...) the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world’ by 2010” Council, 2000, p. 3). The Conclusions ascribe particular objectives to a number of policy areas. For education and training, the Lisbon Conclusions define a number of goals, including an increase in investment, halving the number of young people with only lower secondary education, defining basic skills for the lifelong learning agenda, creating more transparency in the recognition of qualifications.

All the LLP objectives, Lisbon indicators, key competences, and LLP horizontal policies, as well as the Education and Training Work programme 2010 were fully met on all levels in the EASE Project.

The EASE project addresses the E&T 2010 programme by improving E&T for teachers and trainers within a sector where pedagogical coherence and continuity is not yet achieved. In many countries there is little systematic coordination between different elements of teacher education leading to a lack of coherence and continuity.

The EASE project targeted the enhancement of European training systems by introducing a module for individualised learning. Teachers were enabled, not only to impart knowledge, but to act as tutors and leading learners to show children their individual pathway to knowledge, to empower them to become autonomous learners.

The project intended to promote an effective transition and greater equity and efficiency in learning in the pre-and primary sector. The initial education and in-service training of pre-and primary school teachers will be upgraded by an additional qualification in Early Literacy to respond both to changes and expectations in our knowledge-based economy and society.

The objectives taught in the Educational Transition course are to reinforce children's motivation to learn, an essential pre-requisite for quality learning throughout their lives and thus reduce the incidence of low achievers. In addition the EASE project aims at giving supplementary support to children with diverse learning rights, including those of children whose mother tongue is not the language of learning.
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In this approach the intrinsic value of each person is recognized. Learning to be, learning to learn and learning to live together are considered critical elements in the journey of each child towards human and social development.

Irene Kaschefi-Haude
Cologne, October 2010
7. References/


