



Education under the age of 6

This month, we are presenting some of the different resources that focus on the theme of "school education under the age of 6", with an overview of the scientific literature principally emanating from the United States, Great Britain and France. We have tried to assemble recently published data (2004 – 2005) in order to provide a summary (although not an exhaustive one), of the research currently being carried out in this area.

On reading these documents (articles, studies, monographs etc), four principal themes emerge: current situations and comparative viewpoints, teacher training, care policies and the concept of "school readiness", and finally the "curriculum" and specific educational approaches.

[Current situations and comparative viewpoints](#) | [Teacher Training](#) | [Care policies and "school readiness"](#) | [Curricula and specific educational approaches](#)

Background information

We have provided below a few basic explanations of the age and class equivalents in the countries listed above.

- Kindergarten: corresponds to the French first-year infants (aged 6). Each year that follows then goes from first grade (aged 7) to the twelfth grade (aged 18) i.e. from K-1 to K-12. The period that precedes kindergarten is referred to as pre-K. The structures that correspond to these periods include day nurseries, nursery schools, play-schools, nursery classes etc. and vary enormously in terms of organisation, logistics and human resources from country to country.
- School readiness: is the readiness of the child to receive school education. This is often linked to the socio-economical level of the family and the parents' level of education.

Listed below are several American studies, in addition to various important concepts, which are referred to in several articles in this newsletter.

- [Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Birth Cohort \(ECLS-B, 2001\)](#) : a representative sample of 10,600 American children took part in this study. Data were assembled for the key ages of 9 months, 2 years, 4 years, 5 years and 6 years. The information concerns the cognitive, emotional and physical development of children at home and at school.
- [Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten class of 1998-99 \(ECLS-K\)](#) : for this study, the selected children were monitored from kindergarten (aged 6) to the fifth grade (aged 12) and data were collected in the autumn and spring of the years 1998/99, 1999/2000, and in the spring of years 2002 and 2004.

The [NICHD study of early child care and youth development](#) began in 1989 and continues today. Initiated by the National Institute of Child Health, this study has already been the subject of [numerous publications and interpretations](#)

Current situations and comparative viewpoints

The British study [Early years of education: an international perspective](#), which was published in 2002, is part of the research initiated by the [Curriculum and Assessment Framework \(INCA\)](#) and the [National Foundation for Educational research](#). Its objective is to present an overview of the existing programmes and structures available for children of a preschool age in 20 countries, in addition to a programme of measures that need to be implemented. Following the country classification data produced by the OCDE on [Early education and care \(2000 – 2002\)](#), this comparative study summarises the international situation and offers a global assessment of curricula, educational practices, teachers' qualifications, continuity within the primary system and evaluation methods.

The debate over the starting age for preschool structures remains a little hazy in most countries except France and Belgium, which are the only countries to accept children at only 2 years old. The study lists, country by country, care conditions for children aged from 2 to 7, the types of structure available and the obligatory starting age. For example, school is obligatory from the age of 4 onwards in Northern Ireland and the Netherlands, and from the age of 7 in Singapore and Canada. The qualification levels required for the supervisory and teaching staff and the adult/child ratios also vary. Choices become more complicated when it comes to curricula. The cultural and family traditions linked to the development of children from birth to the age of 6 vary fundamentally from country to country and make it difficult to draw up a formalised and universal curriculum. The contents and characteristics of such a curriculum are also discussed in great detail: should the learning programme be focused around the child or is it up to the child to adapt to the programme?

Out of the 19 countries that took part in the study, 13 have already defined the basic principles of a national programme (the other 6, i.e. Australia, Canada, Germany, Italy, Switzerland and the United States, are governed by state or regional laws). To summarise: very few countries propose a curriculum for children under the age of 3; most countries define areas of learning and a few activities (not disciplines), such as social, emotional and cultural basics, creativity, language, letters, figures

and the environment. Most intend to use this curriculum to emphasise the country's cultural traditions and social assets. (Appendix 1, on page 45, presents the programmes adopted by each country).

In France

Agnès Florin, in [Les modes de garde à deux ans. Qu'en dit la recherche ? \(What does research say about care modes for children aged 2?\)](#) (PIREF, 2002) proposes a summary of the following issues: the current preschool education situation, care and development modes within the French environment, schooling at the age of 2 (and its impact on subsequent schooling) and finally the care modes adopted internationally for young children. The author describes in meticulous detail the activities proposed by care structures, and notably the programmes offered by nursery schools, which are more oriented towards educational activities that boost language learning.

The author stresses the importance of the major Anglo-Saxon studies as evaluation instruments and describes them in great detail, confirming the primordial role that these countries play in international research in this area. She quotes different philosophical approaches that illustrate the importance of the programmes adopted by children's care structures, whilst insisting on the importance of the role played by families in the cognitive development of the young child.

□ And also

- [Les dossiers des sciences de l'éducation](#) (educational science journal) n° 7, 2002: this journal analyses, by comparing the different preschooling systems, the choice in France to adopt a nursery school approach that is similar to the schooling approach, and the cultural aspects of this somewhat exceptional situation.

In the United States

In the article [Tracking students from the ECLS KC of 1998-99](#) published in the journal *Education statistics quarterly*, vol. 6, n° 3, 2004, Val Plisko presents the [ECLS KC](#) study, carried out in 1998, which follows the cognitive development of a sample of children from their earliest years of learning. The varying degrees of success become very noticeable from the fourth grade onwards (age 10) according to the [National assessment of educational progress](#) produced in 2004. The ECLS demonstrates that in fact these differences take shape much earlier, when the child first starts at kindergarten. The author, who comments on the results of this study, shows the importance of learning during the very earliest years of schooling, and asserts that pupils who have already acquired the basic skills subsequently retain their advance. This is also the opinion of Katherine Magnuson in [Inequality in preschool education and school readiness](#)

Similarly, Luis M. Laosa in [Effects of preschool on educational achievement](#) published by the [NIEER](#) in March 2005, redefines the context of the programme *No child left behind*, which aims to implement reforms in the secondary education system, in order to reduce the achievement gap between pupils. Luis Laosa emphasises the significant impact of preschooling on the acquisition of basic skills. He is in favour of a systematic schooling approach (for which each state would be responsible), from the age of 3-4 (pre-K). This measure would reinforce the approach initiated through the NCLB Act. Indeed, studies such as the ECLS- B show that a high-quality nursery school system can improve performances and school readiness, especially for pupils from underprivileged backgrounds. In the author's opinion, the achievement gap **already exists prior to the obligatory school starting age**. He lists several programmes implemented in certain states and looks at the question of teacher training and the academic levels required for nursery schools. (Also see the article by W. S. Barnett, published in 2003 in [Preschool policy matters, n°2: Better teachers, better preschools: student achievement linked to teacher qualifications](#)).

As far as financial investments are concerned, [The state of preschool, 2004 state preschool yearbook](#) published in 2005 by the [National Institute for Early Education Research](#) (NIEER) proposes a general view, state by state, of the disparities in the way different structures function and in their budgetary and logistical resources. Indeed, for the time being, the problems related to the creating of new establishments are the responsibility of each state and not the federal government.

Similarly, the [Quality pre-kindergarten for all: state legislative report](#) , published by the [Trust for early education](#) in September 2004, lists the measures and financial resources implemented in each state to provide every child with high-quality pre-primary education. To date, fifteen states have increased their budgetary participation for 2005 in order to increase the number of care structures for children aged between 3 and 5.

To take a more specific example, [The economics of investing in universal preschool in California](#) study, published by RAND in March 2005, analyses the economic implications, expenses and returns on investment when creating new preschool facilities in California. The financial aspect is discussed here in order to show that the benefits of a high quality preschool programme provided for children from underprivileged backgrounds are greater in terms of profits for the government and society in general than the actual costs of creating them. The quality concept appears regularly in these documents and refers to specific educational programmes run by qualified teachers. If you would like to take a closer look at this economic approach, you should also read [An economic analysis of four-year-old kindergarten in Wisconsin: returns to the education system](#) , published in September 2005 by [Pre-K Now](#) : for each dollar invested in the creation of a new preschool establishment, the state of Wisconsin saves 68 cents on its future educational investments, and the tax-payer saves up to 17 dollars.

The [Getting from here to there: to an ideal early preschool system](#) article by James J. Gallagher et al. ([Early childhood research & practice, spring 2004, Vol. 6, n° 1](#)), examines, from a more organisational perspective, the problems of co-ordination between four different federal aid programmes for children under the age of 6 and their parents. Indeed, the authors denounce the lack of common strategies between these services. They suggest ways in which legislative, administrative and professional reforms could be implemented in order to converge the different services towards a unique and efficient schooling and care system.

□ And also

- [Preschool Education: A Concept Whose Time Has Come](#) , Steven Barnett, published in the magazine *Principal*, in the issue of September/October 2005, [National association of elementary school principal](#)
- [ECS Tools and resources, pre-kindergarten database](#) : comparative database of the structures currently in existence within the 50 states, published on-line by the [Education Commission of the States](#) (ECS).

In Great Britain

In a report published in February 2004 entitled [Early years: Progress in developing high quality childcare and early education accessible for all](#), the [National Audit Office](#) (NAO, equivalent of the French *Cour des Comptes*) lists the priority measures to be implemented by the government in order to develop care structures for children aged from 0 to 4 (especially full-time structures). The principal measures must provide a means of increasing capacities (notably in certain more underprivileged regions), boosting the longevity of these services and improving the quality of staff training.

The [British educational research journal](#), vol. 30, n° 5, October 2004, devotes an entire issue (6 articles) to the theme Early years education. In [Early years education and care: three agendas](#), Brenda Taggart briefly retraces the different policies dedicated to developing the British preschooling system. Since the Labour Party came to power, education for very young children has become an integral part of educational research and related policies. The [Sure start programme](#), for example, (a social reform involving an investment of 500 million pounds per year) enables parents to go back to work by proposing suitable care structures for their children. Other political initiatives have enabled Early years development and childcare partnership (EYDCPs) to see the light of day. These services have been introduced in each region in order to provide education authorities with coherent assistance. **By end 2004, all children aged between 3 and 5** were to have access to preschooling education. Similarly, the [Foundation Stage Curriculum](#) clearly outlines this learning period as a distinct and primordial phase within the educational process.

□ And also

- [Preschool spending leads world: three and four-year-olds in the United Kingdom are receiving the best-funded education in the industrialised world](#), according to the annual report by the OCDE (article on the BBC news, UK edition).

And elsewhere

- [Education server In Germany](#): the Deutscher Bildungsserver (or Eduserver) is an information portal – principally in German – providing details about the state education system in Germany. It provides a very comprehensive section on [preschooling](#).
- [New Zealand Ministry of Education](#): the New Zealand ministry has dedicated an entire section of its web site to preschooling education, notably including resources on the curricula.

Teacher training

France remains an exception in this area. Very few countries have introduced a national recruitment system, guaranteeing that nursery school teachers have a minimum qualification level equivalent to 4 years of higher education. The United States are looking very closely at this issue and most of their studies show that high-quality teaching is dependent on the training level of the staff that look after the children in preschool structures. This theory has also been reinforced by numerous articles and reports.

Debra J. Ackerman, in [Getting teachers from here to there: examining issues related to an early care and education teacher policy](#) published in [Early childhood research & practice](#), vol. 7, n° 1, in the spring of 2005, shows the importance of teacher qualifications and training in "early care education". In the United States, not all the states have the same requirements in terms of teacher qualifications. Some require a BA (Bachelor's degree, the equivalent of the French *licence*) specialised in early education, others require only the equivalent of A levels. The article encourages the introduction of an official and federal minimum **training level for nursery school teachers** in order to give preschooling the place it deserves in the educational chain. Requirements must therefore be levelled (upwards) in terms of salary and qualifications.

The [National pre-kindergarten study](#) (NPS) initiated in 2003/2004 and financed by the [NIEER](#), resulted in various analysis reports. The first section of these reports was published at end March 2005: [From Capitols to classrooms, Policies to Practice: state-funded prekindergarten at the classroom level, part 1: Who's teaching our youngest students? teacher education and training experience, compensation and benefits, and assistant teachers?](#) The authors, Walter Gilliam and Crista Marchessault of the Yale University Child Study Center, used the data supplied by this major federal study (3,900 teachers from the 40 States that finance pre-primary schools), the first study to evaluate the implementing of specific practices "in the field" in order to study the profiles of pre-primary teachers. They created a "stereotype" teacher profile at a national level. The result was a white woman who works in a state school for between 35 and 38 hours per week with an annual salary of \$24,000 to \$31,000. In 25% of cases, she has no bachelors degree (equivalent of the French *licence*) and in 75% of cases belongs to the low salary class (14% of which are beneath the state level of poverty).

This problem, which is only recent in certain countries, has been the subject of debate for a long time in Finland. From a historical point of view, Sari Husa and Jarmo Kinos, authors of the article [Academisation of early childhood education](#), published in the [Scandinavian journal of educational research](#), vol. 49, n° 2, April, 2005, looks more specifically at the role that teachers play, and the first educational experiments in this area. The authors retrace the history, concept and functioning of the preschool system in Finland, treating the subject as a scientific discipline, distinct from other areas of education. In their opinion, this teaching phase should be studied as a specific issue in educational science.

Care policies and "school readiness"

The report [Making the most of Kindergarten: present trends and future issues in the provision of full-day programs](#) by Debra J. Ackerman, (March 2005, NIEER) is in favour of a full-day at Kindergarten. The authors analyse the activities proposed, and comparative studies based on results (school or behavioural) obtained whilst monitoring children attending half or full-day full programmes. The analysis shows that the full-day is beneficial in terms of learning the "basic subjects" (learning to read and write, maths etc) in the short term, and particularly for children from underprivileged environments. These effects remain visible at least 2 years after starting kindergarten. **The research in this area, however, is still too limited** to provide reliable and accurate results, notably with regard to the duration of the positive effects and the professional level of the teachers. (See also the reports: [Full-day and half-day kindergarten in the United States](#), NIEER, June 2004 and [Full day kindergarten](#), (Education Commission of the States, July 2005).

Children from underprivileged backgrounds

For Katherine AZ. Magnuson in [Inequality in preschool education and school readiness](#) (American education Journal, vol. 41, n° 1, August 2004), a child reaches "school readiness", before starting at Kindergarten (age 6). Pupils that have received a preschool education obtain better results in maths and reading, and they retain this advantage both in the 1st grade (aged 7) and throughout their schooling. However, in another article published more recently (in April 2005) [Does pre-kindergarten improve school preparation and performance?](#), the author puts forward the viewpoint that schooling at too early an age can have a damaging impact on the development of behaviour, with the result that children can be more aggressive. However, she confirms the theory that a child has more chance of acquiring the basic skills when starting at kindergarten, and that the benefits are even more obvious for children from underprivileged backgrounds.

In [Early childhood care and education: effects on ethnic and racial gaps in school readiness](#), an article published in the spring of 2005 ([The future of children](#), vol. 15, n°1), Katherine Magnuson examines the issue in more detail, suggesting that if young Hispanic and black pupils had access to high-quality pre-primary teaching, the achievement gap between them and white children would be reduced. This is particularly the case with Hispanic children, very few of whom attend preschool programmes. Her viewpoint is shared by Ron Haskins and Cecilia Rouse in their report [Closing Achievement Gap](#) (May 2005). According to them, **preschool** programmes have the capacity to reduce these gaps by 50% on a sustainable basis. They also suggest that parents should be given help with preparing their children for these programmes. Other data on expulsion rates have been analysed by doctor Gilliam in [Prekindergarteners left behind](#) (May 2005), a study published by the Foundation for child development in May 2005.

In France, the schooling of children aged two or three has been a subject of controversy, particularly over the last few years. Everyone agrees, however, that an exception should be made when it comes to children in priority education zones. Why? What are the conclusions to be drawn when it comes to defining projects specifically for priority education? The *Rencontres de l'OZP* (Priority Zone Research Institute seminars), [Les 2 ans à l'école maternelle en Zep \(Two-year-olds at nursery schools in priority education zones\)](#) (October 2004), drew attention to three experiments on schooling for children under the age of three, which were described by Olga Baudelot, a researcher at the CRESAS-INRP (now at the GREG Paris 13).

These three reorientation class experiments, carried out at the beginning of the Nineties, illustrate the importance of the role played by families. Over the years, the subject of parents' questions change from behavioural matters to learning activities, with which they are often asked to help. But if this partnership is to be successful, parent communication needs to be rethought and experiments need to be carried out in other forms, both in classroom situations and in specific workshops

The parent/teacher relationship

The study [The impact of ready environments on achievement in kindergarten](#) by Regena Falls Nelson, published in the Journal of research in childhood education, vol. 19, n° 3, April 2005 (the conclusions of which are based on data from the ECSL study) shows how education at home, and above all preschool teaching, contributes to the cognitive development of children before they start at kindergarten. Children who attend nursery school lessons acquire better basic skills (maths and reading and writing).

[Accueillir et éduquer la petite enfance : relations entre parents et professionnels \(care and education for the very young: the parent/professional relationship\)](#), directed by Sylvie Rayna and Gilles Brougères, looks at the French situation through numerous different contexts (nursery schools, day nurseries, child minders etc) and sheds light on the positioning of the different players (professionals, parents and children).

Although all the articles suggest that good parent/professional relationships improve a child's development, they also all show that communication zones have varying levels of asymmetry **depending on the institutional legitimacy of the environment and the socio-cultural proximity of the parents vis-à-vis the school education "model"**.

For the authors, the "abstract" co-education approach extolled by the official texts since 1989 remains illusory and it is essential that diverse personal situations are taken into account in order to boost the emergence of exchanges.

Sylvie Rayna, who directed the project, also wrote an article published in March 2004 in the specialist journal, *Early years*, an international journal of research and development, entitled: [professional practices with under-ones in French and Japanese day care centers](#).

The child's development and the concept of "school readiness"

At what age is a child "ready" to go to school? Debra J. Ackerman and Steven Barnett in [Prepared for kindergarten: what does readiness mean?](#), (March 2005, *NIEER*) analyse the key problems linked to this concept of "school readiness" and examine all the factors that either boost or hinder this "readiness". They offer several definitions of school readiness (from both a teacher's and parent's perspective) and recommend political reforms in order to guarantee an increase in the number of registrations for preschool facilities.

In [Building social capital in early childhood education and care: an Australian study \(BJER, October 2004\)](#), Ann Farrell, Collette Tayler and Lee Tennent look specifically at the child's "social capital", and its capacity to build a relational network based on trust. According to their study, carried out on 138 Australian children aged between 4 and 8, the authors conclude that early schooling contributes to the construction of this social capital and that the basic skills acquired influence the child's life in both the short and long term.

In [The impact of preschool on young children's cognitive attainments at entry to reception](#), the authors (Pam Simmons et al, *BJER, October 2004*), analyse the conclusions of the EPPE study and confirm the importance of the family environment for the cognitive development of the young child and, when this is not stimulating enough, the importance of preschooling and its duration, which has the capacity to limit the social exclusion of underprivileged children. The authors also evoke initiatives such as [Sure Start](#) and [Early Excellence](#) implemented by the British government in the Nineties.

□ And also

- [L'éducation prioritaire, maternelle et ZEP \(Priority education, nursery schools and priority education zones\)](#): a section on the Scéren site, which proposes articles, conferences, studies and theses on the general problem of French nursery schools, schooling at the age of two, the importance of pre-elementary schooling and relationships with the families
- The thesis by Jérôme BONNET [Adaptation psychosociale en milieu préscolaire : contribution d'une approche pragmatique, holistique et développementale au dépistage et à la prévention des difficultés d'ajustement \(Psychosocial adaptation in the preschool environment: contribution of a pragmatic, holistic and developmental approach to detecting and preventing adjustment difficulties\)](#), Université Toulouse 2, 2003.

Curricula and specific educational approaches

The educational approaches

The study [How to expand and improve preschool in California?](#), 2005, PACE ([Policy Analysis for California Education](#)) looks at the practices in place in preschool structures in California, and lists the different educational approaches observed such as the "cognitivist" or "emotional" approach and the "direct instruction" approach. The first, focusing on the choice of the child and its emotional development, is based around the physical and intellectual stimulation of the child through essentially entertaining activities in small groups. The second is based around explicit and structured academic teaching in larger groups of pupils.

For more information on these approaches, see the report [Interventions pédagogiques efficaces et réussite scolaire des élèves provenant de milieux défavorisé \(Efficient educational interventions and the success at school of pupils from underprivileged backgrounds\)](#) by Clermont Gauthier et al, published in 2004 in Canada. This report identifies the educational practices most likely to improve the school performances of those most at risk of dropping out. Also read the article by Gary Adams on the project Follow Through, published in 1995, [Project Follow Through: In-depth and Beyond](#). The aim of this project was to compare and analyse the efficiency of around twenty educational approaches applied to pupils from underprivileged socio-economical backgrounds. This experiment was carried out with children at nursery school and in the first three years of primary school. It is a longitudinal study carried out over a period of around ten years and involved 70,000 pupils from 180 schools.

According to the PACE study, the conclusions are not unanimous (as the experiments carried out in this area are still too few and results have not yet been empirically corroborated) except in the cases of three approaches, which are more widely recognised:

- The "traditional direct approach" which favours the academic approach of the systematic teaching of basic skills such as reading, writing and maths.
- The "[HighReach curriculum](#)", which is linked to the philosophy according to which a child learns better by manipulating and exploring, but with the aid of an adult. This cognitivist approach reflects the theories of Jean Piaget, Erik Erikson, Lev Vygotsky, David Ausubel and Jerome Bruner.
- The "High/Scope, creative curriculum": this theory, which revolves around a respect for rhythm, the pupil's needs and interests (and which is also based on the theories of Jean Piaget), was designed by David Weikart in the Sixties.

The aim of the last two strategies is to allow for optimal emotional development, which, according to partisans of this type of model, is necessary for school learning.

Moreover, the High/Scope, Perry preschool project ([Educational Research Foundation](#)) has just published (2005) a study entitled [The High/Scope Perry preschool study through age 40](#), which analyses the progress made by 123 black Americans, aged between 3 and 4, from very underprivileged environments (under the poverty level) between 1962 and 1967 (today they are aged 40). Half of them (58) attended a high-quality preschool programme based on the High/Scope approach (see the [pre-kindergarten program](#)), the other half (65) did not follow any programme at all. This scientific experiment had the advantage of identifying both the short and long term effects of a pre-primary programme on children who were highly unlikely to succeed in the schooling system. The study concludes that those who attended the programme have higher salaries, are more stable in their jobs, commit fewer crimes and go further in their school curriculum (see [conclusions of the report](#)).

The [Going to Scale with High-Quality Early Education: Choices and Consequences in Universal Pre-Kindergarten Efforts](#) report, (August 2005, [RAND](#)), identifies the innovative educational practices implemented on a small scale in 8 American states in order to generalise a high-quality public preschool care proposal. The authors highlight the financial, administrative, logistical and educational requirements necessary for the generalisation of a high-quality "pre-kindergarten". Today, these structures range from a complete annual programme run by qualified teachers to no programme at all with half-day care spread over 2 or 3 quarters. The authors stress, however, that there is **a lack of detailed research in the field of curricula**, in addition to a lack of field experiments, in spite of the longitudinal studies in progress such as the ECLS B and K.

The question of standards is discussed in [Promoting children's social and emotional development through preschool](#), by Judi Boyd, W. Steven Barnett (May 2005, NIEER). This study proposes an overview of the experiments in progress on the question of the programmes offered by pre-primary structures and how they can influence children's social and emotional development. The authors make recommendations with regard to curricula and standards. They recommend the implementing of high-quality programmes in order to stimulate as early as possible the development of intellectual, motivational and socio-emotional capacities. Indeed, teachers report that many of their pupils have not been properly prepared for confronting the upsets caused by attending school. According to certain studies, 20% of the children starting at Kindergarten and 30% of the children from poor socio-economical backgrounds have behavioural problems.

In Great Britain, in [Researching pedagogy in English preschools](#) (BJER, October 2004), Siraj-Blatford and Sylva, summarise and comment on the results of 2 research projects implemented by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES): the [Effective provision of preschool education](#) (EPPE) and the [Researching pedagogy in the early years](#) (REPEY).

The EPPE, like the similar American study ECLS, shows that preschooling offers a genuine advantage in terms of acquiring basic skills, especially vis-à-vis children from underprivileged backgrounds. These studies have had a real impact on the government's policy, which is doubling its efforts to create a high-quality nursery school system. However, specific educational strategies still need to be defined for this age-group. The REPEY study, written by the same authors, attempts to identify the best educational practices already in existence. According to the experiments carried out, and following an analysis of these

practices, the authors draw attention to two concepts: "active learning" and "sustained shared thinking", the educational approach derived from this concept (the teacher and the school environment must provide the child with all the material and intellectual opportunities available for cognitive development).

The "field" experiments

In her article *Le partenariat école-famille : le rôle de l'enfant messenger* (The school-family partnership: the role of the child messenger) – an extract from *Accueillir et éduquer la petite enfance* (Care and education for the very small child), INRP, 2005), Véronique Francis is not so much interested in the direct relationships between school and family, but in the "conversational type learning approaches" such as the "cahier de vie" (a diary for both schoolwork and family life) or "cahier de liaison" (a log book that acts as a link between school and parents) which, through the participation of the child (who often becomes very motivated and involved in this approach), facilitate parental access (even for the most underprivileged) to the school experience.

This type of approach, a medium for both family conversation as well as for the child's monologues, contributes to his/her language development, enables him/her to make some sense of his/her environment and legitimises his/her position as a pupil in the family cell. Participating in its own production, and perhaps even encouraged to compose new "texts" within the family, the child learns to construct his/her semantic world by collecting, keeping and storing away information and images.

But the "success" of this approach relies heavily on the manner in which the teachers integrate (or not as the case may be) the "cahier" into their work, and the persistent temptation to use it to stigmatise parental behaviour represents a genuine risk.

For K. Ravanis in *Les sciences physiques à l'école maternelle : un cadre sociocognitif pour la construction des connaissances et/ou le développement des activités didactiques* (Physical sciences at nursery school: a socio-cognitive environment for the construction of knowledge and/or the development of didactic activities) (International review of education, May 2005), the construction of knowledge concerning physical phenomena together with the implementing of creative activities for this discipline are both necessary and efficient at the preschool age.

Florence Labrell, in her article "Que nous apprennent les recherches sur l'étayage parental des connaissances des jeunes enfants pour la mise en place des apprentissages langagiers à l'école maternelle" (What do we learn from research on parental support with the education of their children in order to implement language learning at nursery school) (RFP, n° 151, April-May-June 2005), examines adult-child interactions in early language learning systems. The results of research in this area can be reinvested in educational practices. Florence Labrell presents several aspects of this work and highlights the American theoretical approach of distantiation.

Similarly, by examining the importance of stories told to young pupils, Claude Le Manchec, stresses in *L'expérience narrative à l'école maternelle* (The narrative experience at nursery school), (INRP, 2005) that the story represents the language through which socialisation can be expressed. Contrary to certain approaches, the author considers that the story must not be reduced to a vector of language development, by under-estimating the importance of the adult/child relationship, which it constructs, and the importance of relational issues. In addition to the cognitive aspect, stories consequently have significant psychological, social and linguistic importance. They contribute to the transmission of a common cultural inheritance.

□ And also

- Learning the first fundamental steps, community life: the discovery of other people, schooling at the age of 2: a sound knowledge base, Diane Galbaud, *Le Monde de l'Éducation*, n° 339, September 2005.
- The thesis by Martine Fialip-Baratte, *L'écriture avant l'écriture. Discours d'enfants de maternelle* (Writing before writing. The words of nursery school children), Université Lille 3, 2003.
- The thesis by Françoise Brosset-Eriksen, *Prendre conscience des enjeux de la communication linguistique pour apprendre à parler juste à l'école maternelle* (Awareness of the importance of linguistic communication to learn to speak well at nursery school), Université Paris 5, 2003.
- *The education of small children by both parents and professionals*, a project under the direction of Marie-Paule Thollon-Béhar, September 2005, ERES.

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