



Ensuring Warm and
Inclusive Transitions



BASELINE STUDY REPORT

Finnish teachers' pre-service training about inclusive
transitions in ECEC, pre-primary and primary education

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1. Introduction

In Finland, the education system for young children is organized in three different institutions, namely early childhood education and care (0-5-years old), pre-primary education (6-year-old) and primary education (from 7-12-years old). Each of these system levels has its own history, qualification requirements and steering documents like curricula. The initial training of the professionals working in those institutions has been organized partly following the historical separateness of the institutions. Recently, the collaboration between and among the education and training institutions have been emphasized. This emphasis is based on the wish to develop a coherent education system, where the shared vision continuities and are recognized (see Finnish Government, 2021).

This baseline study report illustrates how the phenomenon of inclusive transition is included in the curricula and pedagogical practices of the Finnish universities that have programmes for professionals working in the early childhood education and care (ECEC), pre-primary and primary education. In Finland, InTrans project has focused on the transitions from ECEC to pre-primary and further to primary education. Since the teachers are in charge of organizing and developing these practices, this report concentrates on the programmes that give qualifications for the above-mentioned teacher positions. They are the programmes for ECEC teachers, primary teachers and special education teachers.

The baseline study report is divided into four sections. First, we briefly describe the professionals' qualification requirements and teachers' pre-service education and training to offer a context for the curricula document and focus group discussion analysis. After that, we present the findings based on the curricula document analysis. That will follow the description of the analysis based on focus group discussions with university teachers and researchers as well as the interviews with the former students, current beginner professionals. The conclusion and recommendations are presented at the end of the report.

1.1 Professionals working in the ECEC, pre-primary and early primary education transitions

In Finland, the qualification requirements are defined in the legislation that all service providers must follow. As mentioned, the teachers are in charge of coordinating and developing the pedagogical practices, including the transition practices between various institutions. They work together with the other staff members. Thus, also childcarers in early childhood education and care and social pedagogues in early childhood education and care take part in the daily horizontal transitions. The qualification requirements of each professional group are the following:

Teacher in early childhood education and care

The qualification criterion for the role of teacher in early childhood education and care is at least a Bachelor's degree in Education, which includes studies that give the teacher professional skills for tasks in early childhood education and care. Further provisions on these studies may be issued by Government decree, and an existing bachelor's degree in Education may be supplemented with the above -mentioned studies to meet the qualification criterion.

Social pedagogue in early childhood and care

Social pedagogues are qualified to work in ECEC, but not qualified to work in pre-primary education.

The qualification criterion for the role of a social pedagogue in early childhood education and care is at least a bachelor's degree in healthcare and social services, comprising at least 60 credits worth of studies oriented towards early childhood education and care and social pedagogy. Further provisions on these studies may be issued by Government decree, and an existing Bachelor's degree in healthcare and social services may be supplemented with the above-mentioned studies to meet the qualification criterion.

Childcarer in early childhood education and care

The childcarers in ECEC can work together with the teachers and social pedagogues in early childhood education environment (with 0-5-years old children). In addition, childcarers in ECEC are qualified to work alongside with the ECEC teachers or primary teachers in pre-primary education context. In practice, their work mainly focuses on horizontal transitions and the teachers are in charge of implementing and developing the vertical transitions from one institution to another.

The qualification criterion for the post of childcarer in early childhood education and care is a vocational upper secondary qualification in education and guidance, a vocational upper secondary qualification in healthcare and social services or some other suitable qualification that includes or has been supplemented with adequately extensive study modules on care, upbringing and education of children.

Primary teacher

The qualification criterion for the post of primary teachers is a master's degree in education, the subjects taught in schools -studies and teachers' pedagogical studies. Primary teachers are qualified to work in pre-primary education as a pre-primary teacher.

Special education teachers in ECEC, pre-primary education and primary education

The qualification criterion for the post of special education teacher with a broad scope are a master's degree. Eligibility can also be achieved by completing a master's degree in educational science, which includes the studies of a special education teacher.

For the qualification of a special class teacher, master's degree in education, multidisciplinary studies in subjects taught in primary school, teacher's pedagogical studies and special education teacher studies are required.

A special education teacher in early childhood education is required to receive a Bachelor of Education degree, which includes studies that provide professional capacity for early childhood education and special education teacher studies.

1.2 Descriptions of the pre-service training system in Finland

Education and training in early childhood education and care (0-5 years old) covers a broad and diverse spectrum of education and training provision. Qualification and degree programmes are provided at two system levels, first in secondary education institutions (over 100 training providers: qualification for childcarer in ECEC and pre-primary education), and at the higher education level, namely in the universities of applied sciences (20-22 universities of applied sciences: qualification for social pedagogue in ECEC) and in the universities (7 universities: qualification for teacher in ECEC and pre-primary education). Each of these has its own forms of guidance and different procedures and practices. (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2021.)

Education and training for pre-primary and primary education (6-12 years old) takes place at the universities. Typically, the ECEC teacher programme, primary teacher programme and special teacher programme are organized in the same university faculty. In most universities, a part of the studies, typically the major subject studies, is joined for all the above-mentioned teacher programmes.

1.3 Coordination and evaluation of the programmes

The Finnish Constitution safeguards the autonomy of universities, and the Universities Act secures the general administrative framework in universities. Thus, all universities have strong autonomy to draw up and evaluate their curricula. Typically, the curricula are made for a three- or four-year period. The preparation process is collective, the final decision regarding the curricula content is made by Faculty board. During the fixed period, minor changes can be made by the Dean of the faculty. Nowadays, the students' feedback is significant in the revision process of the curricula. They can give feedback during and after each course. In addition, a broader evaluation survey may be conducted before the revision process. Also, collaboration with the working life representatives is stressed. They may attend the working groups preparing the curricula texts or give their feedback after certain courses or academic terms. All universities are committed to national and international quality management principles and guidelines. The Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC) organizes the audits.

The main structures of the degrees are defined in the legislation. This includes the extent of the major subject, minor subjects, and optional studies. These structures are closely related to the qualification requirements of each professional group.

Recently, two national level Forums funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture, namely The Teacher Education Forum and The Forum for Developing Education and Training Provision and Programmes in Early Childhood Education and Care, have been established to coordinate and develop the initial training in ECEC, pre-primary education and primary education. For now, topics as transition have not as such been discussed in the Forum processes, but the discussion has focused on more general issues. In addition, the established of these forums can be interpreted as emphasis on the structural continuity in the education and training entity.

The Forum for Developing Education and Training Provision and Programmes in Early Childhood Education and Care

In 2019, the Minister of Education and Culture launched the work of the Forum for Developing Education and Training Provision and Programmes in Early Childhood Education and Care. The mandate of Forum was in 2019 –2020. The Forum drafted a proposal for a development programme for all levels and forms of education and training in early childhood education and care for the years 2021 –2030. (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2021.) Programme for Developing Education and

Training Provision and Programmes in Early Childhood Education and Care 2021–2030 consists of the premises and recommendations for developing all levels and forms of education and training in early childhood education and care. The Forum's mandate called for the recent changes and priorities in early childhood education and training policy to be considered in preparing the development programme. The work and regional consultations carried out by the Forum have shown that there are shortcomings in people's understanding of ECEC education and training as a whole and of the characteristics of the various parts of it. Overall, it is estimated that the establishment and work of the Forum for Developing Education and Training Provision and Programmes in Early Childhood Education and Care has encouraged education and training providers to work together, brought to light topical information on the current situation in existing ECEC education and training provision and programmes and shed light on the need for change.

In the above-mentioned Programme, the observations formulated during the Forum's work were brought together and recommendations for developing education and training provision and programmes in early childhood education and care are presented under four themes:

- a fast-changing early childhood education and care environment calls for strong professional competence
- meeting the needs of early childhood education and care workforce by means of foresight and flexible education and training paths
- developing ECEC education and training programmes in cooperation and better quality and cooperation in education and training provision and work environments make working in early childhood education and care attractive and help retain personnel.

To further develop the recommendations included in the Programme, an expert group was established in 2021 which was tasked with drafting an action plan for the implementation of the recommendations. (Karila et al. 2021, In

Finnish https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/163293/OKM_2021_33.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y)

Now, a second term of The Forum has started and will continue until the end of 2023.

The Teacher Education Forum

At the same time, also The Teacher Education Forum has continued its' work. This Forum has published the Development Programme for the teacher education 2022-2026. (See

<https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/164179/TeacherEducationDevelopmentProgramme.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>)

The Forum combines all Universities that offer teacher education at various educational levels, ECEC, Pre-Primary and Primary education as well as Vocational education and Higher education. One of the recent reports made under this Forum relates to the structure of teacher training at universities. Report examines the implementation of the objectives set out in the following programmes: the Key Project for reforming comprehensive education, which is part of the Knowledge and Education priority outlined in the Government Programme, the New Comprehensive School programme, and the Teacher Education Development Programme established by the Teacher Education Forum. The analysis focuses on the following areas:

teacher education unit structure, duties of the staff delivering teacher education, scientific profile and publication activities, degrees and other attainments that entitle the holder to a teaching qualification, and internal cooperation in teacher training at universities.

(https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/161530/OKM_2019_11_Selvitys_opettajankoulutuksen_rakenteesta_yliopistoissa.pdf?sequence=6&isAllowed=y)

One of the main findings presented in this report was that Universities do not have a uniform method for defining which duties of teachers should be covered in teacher training.

Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC) conducts quality audits, thematic evaluations and engineering degree programme reviews

FINEEC is responsible for the evaluation of education provided by universities and universities of applied sciences (UAS) in Finland. The three key evaluation types are the quality audits of higher education institutions (HEIs), thematic evaluations and engineering degree programme reviews. The Finnish legislation for universities and universities of applied sciences contain provisions which oblige HEIs to participate in external evaluation of their activities and quality systems. Quality audits of higher education institutions covering all basic duties of the HEIs have been conducted in Finland since 2005. FINEEC audits are carried out in Finnish, Swedish and English.

Enhancement-led evaluation is the main guiding principle in FINEEC's audits. The goal of enhancement-led evaluation is to involve staff, students, and stakeholders of the HEI in recognizing strengths, good practices and development areas in the HEI's operations. The aim is also to support HEIs in achieving their own objectives, thus creating a premise for the continuous development of HEIs.

FINEEC also conducts thematic evaluations and engineering degree programme reviews in higher education. The theme of the evaluation may concern a single area (e.g. field of education) or a wider topic (e.g. immigrants in higher education). The themes often cover areas that are important regarding educational policy. The aim of thematic evaluations is to produce information to support decision-making and the development of education. FINEEC also evaluates themes across several educational levels (e.g. primary education, secondary education and higher education). During 2022-2023, the Education and training for early childhood education and care is evaluated by the FINEEC's expert group. The evaluation covers all secondary level and higher education level institutions which have early childhood education and care related programmes.

2. A summary of the main curricula contents regarding inclusive early childhood education, pre-primary and primary education transitions

The following small sample illustrates the curricula documents texts in which inclusive transition is somehow described.

In the early childhood education and care teacher programmes the curricula content varied between universities. As mentioned above, the curricula structures were similar to each other. The inclusion issues were dealt with in the context of major subject studies (education) as a part of sociology of education and education policy studies. Inclusion and diversity were also discussed in the context of so-called professional studies. The word transition appeared mainly in the descriptions of the minor subject studies (see the examples below related to the primary teacher programme descriptions). In the compulsory part of the curricula texts transition was not mentioned.

Education and society, 5 ECTS (a joint course with other teacher students as a part of major studies (education))

The course engages students in becoming acquainted with the fundamental questions and structures of education, as well as education's societal and cultural connections. These include the macro- and microstructures of education, education policy and politics as individual and societal phenomena, the hidden curriculum, and the development of educational thinking as part of a critical societal analysis.

The scientific frame of the course is the sociology of education and education policy.

Diversity and Inclusion in Early Childhood Education, 5 ECTS (a course targeted especially for ECEC teacher students)

The course focuses on the role of early childhood education and care as supporting children's development, learning and participation. The student is acquainted with pedagogical approaches to support the development, growth and learning of diverse children and to cultivate the children's worldviews and ethics. The student engages in a critical reflection of his/her own attitudes and perspectives on diversity with a view of developing his/her own stance on addressing diversity in ECEC.

Special Education teacher programmes

In the special education programmes inclusion is well noted also in the vocabulary used in the curricula texts. Instead, transition as a word or concept is rarely mentioned. The following examples illustrate the special education view on inclusion. The first one offers a broader perspective and the second one a more practical perspective.

Society and Inclusive Education, 5 ECTS

Students understand the importance of educational institutions such as early childhood education and primary education for human development.

- Students perceive the importance of social change for human development and the transmission of the local and remote environment to the goals, content and form of human activities.
- The student is introduced to the local disciplines of special pedagogy and the current dialogue of society and special pedagogy.
- The student is familiar with the international development of inclusion and is informed about the stages and process nature of inclusive education.
- The image of people and the importance of values in education globally becomes clearer.

Collaboration and professional interaction skills, 5 ECTS

- Students can define the key concepts of the course (multidisciplinary cooperation, inclusion, pedagogical consultation, co-teaching, resource focus and professional interaction skills)
- The student is able to apply the key concepts of the course to review challenging cases in the school world and is able to critically analyze cases
- The student has trained and gained the capacity to participate in multidisciplinary digital collaboration and plan and evaluate progress
- The student has trained and gained capacity for resource-oriented professional interaction in a digital environment.

In the primary teacher programmes the curricula content varied between universities. The definition and principles of inclusive pedagogic were addressed in courses included in the major subject studies (education), but the transition in those contexts was not usually mentioned. At the minimum, transition themes appeared only in minor subject studies or in optional studies. In most universities, transition themes were placed in advanced studies as compulsory studies for all, and in addition to minor studies. As regards teaching training practices, there was no mention of transitions in the curricula text. However, inclusive principles and equality were mentioned as well as cooperation between pre-primary and primary education.

The focus group discussions emerged that although the curriculum texts did not specifically refer to the transitions, the phenomenon was studied and covered, for example, in teaching practices, as well as in other individual lectures and lessons. Individual lectures are planned by teachers and implementation may vary from year to year.

Examples of the contents of advanced studies in the curriculum for primary teacher education

Pre- and primary school education (5 credits) A continuum of learning paths in primary school, school path transitions and multiprofessional cooperation networks

Insights on early childhood education and early primary school education (3 credits) Students learn to consider the transitions of the child's school path in their own teaching work. Early and primary education as part of the child's school path and transitions at the phase of the school path.

Basics of early childhood education and primary education (5 credits) Students are acquainted with the basics of early education and early primary education. The students become familiar with the contextuality of education and the importance of family in the process of education. The students understand the importance of early childhood education and early primary education on the path of child growth and learning. They will be aware of current themes and challenges of activity systems.

Examples of pre-primary and primary education minor studies in the primary teacher education programme, also in ECEC teacher programme (partly joint courses)

Pedagogy of Pre-primary and Primary Education (5 credits) Students understand the importance of flexible pre-primary and primary school education, understand basic knowledge of child-centric pre-primary, school beginning and early primary education (grades 1 and 2). The course contains the themes of transition from pre-primary to primary school.

Pedagogy of Pre-primary and Primary Education (7 credits) Transitions from pre-primary to primary school, cooperation with guardians and multi-professional cooperation, integration, and cooperation of pre-primary and primary education at school and municipal level.

Pedagogy of Pre-primary and Primary Education (4 credits) The student conceptualizes the educational continuum built from early education to primary education. The student outlines the role of the teacher as part of the child's growth environment. Students can view early childhood education, pre-primary and primary education as a coherent whole within the framework of childhood sociology, identifying interpretations of different periods from childhood. Students are familiar with the transitional stages of early education, pre-primary and primary education from the perspective of social sustainability.

Support for the growth and learning of the child in pre-primary and primary education (3 credits) Students can build a process of flexible support that progresses in stages. Planning and implementation of the support process.

3. Focus group discussions to bring pre-service training organizations from different professional fields together to discuss

3.1 Focus group discussions for the university representatives

For the InTrans- project recognition in Finland this focus group discussion activity was significant. Permission for taking part in the focus group discussions and use the data for research purposes was addressed to the Deans of the faculties. This phase offered a good possibility to introduce the whole European InTrans- project and all WPs already conducted or to be conducted. The focus group meetings offered the same possibility at the teacher and researcher level.

Implementation of the focus group meetings for pre-service training organizations' representatives

Two explanatory focus group meetings were organized in January 2022. In each meeting the university representatives discussed and shared their ideas and experiences concerning the transitions, inclusion and university curricula and pedagogical practices. Altogether 11 teachers and researchers from six of eight Finnish universities attended the meetings. The participants were suggested by the dean of the faculties based on expertise in the topic discussed in the meetings. After being contacted, participants were asked for their actual consent, after they had been told additional information about the study and participants had the opportunity to ask specific questions about the study.

The duration of one meeting was almost two hours. The focus group discussions were informal and conversational. The themes included the educational content and practices of university programmes as far as they relate to early childhood education, pre-primary and primary education transitions, the interpretations of inclusion from the special education teacher, primary teacher and early childhood education teacher programme perspectives. Themes included also the practices related to transitions and the knowledge gained in university studies.

After the first sessions, the recorded discussions were transcribed. The facilitator made a summary that was delivered to the participants of each discussion. The key notions were discussed in the reflective focus group meetings (two meetings, one per group) in March.

The focus group discussions appeared to be very inspiring both for the facilitator and the university representatives. All participants expressed their thankfulness for the opportunity to attend the discussions. Many of the universities were revising their curriculum when the focus group discussions were conducted, and therefore the timing for the meetings was perfect. In addition, the participants appreciated the opportunity to share the experiences with colleagues from other universities since the opportunities to do this were scarce.

Next chapters illustrate the key findings based on the focus group discussions with the university representatives.

How is the theme of inclusive transition included in the curricula texts and pedagogical practices implementing these contents?

The concept of inclusion and transition were first discussed separately in the meetings. After sharing the various interpretations of both concepts and their implementation in the university programmes, the whole phenomenon inclusive transition was discussed. The interpretations of inclusion and transition varied between and within universities in several ways as one of the participants expressed.

"Within the same faculty, there is a slightly different situation for early childhood education and primary teacher training."

Multidimensional understanding of the transition

The understanding regarding transition seems to vary between colleagues in the same university. This became evident for example for one of the participants when she prepared for the focus group meeting by exploring the situation with the colleagues.

"What came up in conversation with colleagues when I myself was used to thinking about the transition from the point of view of socioemotional well-being and then I discovered that the continuum of skills, from reading and mathematics, to the colleague who teaches them,

pointed out that he wants in his teaching, with students from different fields- early childhood education, primary education and special education, emphasize the need to know what is happening in both institutions. Anyhow, we do not have any course called transitions."

Transition as a structural and pedagogical continuity

The participants were often referred to the coherence of the education system and the construction of educational continuity. Understanding the significance of the continuity seemed to be a shared goal for students learning. The following examples illustrate this.

'The purpose of the whole course is that the students would understand that our educational system constitutes such a whole and educational continuity. '

'Also, educational 'discontinuities' different operating cultures and curriculum perspectives are discussed during the courses.'

'This also includes comparing the tradition of early childhood education and primary education and where the pre-primary education is positioned in this continuity'.

The implementation of this general goal in the pedagogical practices was described as follows.

'There are concrete issues, talk about transition planning and at the children's learning plan level, how they form a continuity, talk about cooperation in transition, also talk about inclusivity in transition.

Transition in the life course

Transition was also understood as a significant element in the children's' and adults' life course.

'Another point of view, not so direct, but quite a few people pointed out that we have these courses where the development is studied from baby to elderly people, for example, how literature is used when teaching young children and school children and how to choose it according to the child age and development.'

Transition attached to the age-related pedagogy

The life course orientation was closely related to the age-related pedagogy as described in the following excerpt:

'There is the pedagogy of different age stages, which was associated with this transition. The developmental aspect appears for example in the reading and writing topics, in physical education, mathematics. In those courses we have the same teachers (focusing both pre-primary and primary teaching)'.

Cooperation was highlighted when talking about transitions. It focuses on the 'Co-teachership, co-operation with parents. '

'For us, it has been significant to create models for working together. We have such good openings in the new curriculum, they include multiprofessional collaboration, work with parents. '

Transition capital

The concept of transition capital, which can be viewed both as capital built on a child and as capital for parents, was expressed as one of the approaches considering the transition in the programme. In both cases (children and parents), the quality of transition capital matters in terms of belonging and capability. Transition capital is intertwined with the concept of inclusion, as the following quote embodies.

'... that students would understand that it is important to make transitions and carry out in such a way that the people who are transferring would have a feeling that I am going into a new and important thing, challenges suitably, a sense of suitability and suitability, a sense of suitability, that I fit into this new environment and The requirements and abilities are balanced and that I belong here and I matter here and that I am needed here. '

Thus, the transition also involves the *assimilation of new roles and responsibilities*.

Transition can also be viewed from the *perspective of the cultural expectations* placed on the child by the institutions involved in the transitions.

'Then there are these expectations in the institution, which relate to school readiness and there is a little more sociologically, critically gut-widening grip that stability imposes on the child and the school on the other. And with us in the doctoral dissertations Bordieu and Foucault, there will be perhaps some lens for the child's learning and support for learning. So, we can have such issues when we talk with students about the documentation, what expectations are placed on children in different institutions, how are those institutional cultures in which the transitions take place.'

Especially, related to the horizontal transitions, representatives of ECEC programmes often mentioned the full-time pedagogy and its planning. They also emphasized that the teachers and the rest of the team plan together the transitional situations for children. In this context the horizontal transition situations as significant pedagogical situations were referred. 'This is what we seek to guide students to in theory studies and teaching practice.'

Transition-related teaching was also described to implement related to work communities and educational communities. The following example shed light on this.

'We have a 'working and well-performing educational and teaching communities' course. It is common to early childhood education and care teachers and primary teachers. It explains the path of education and development and the transition as a joint educational path and how to secure the entire path so that the child's and community's well-being could be strengthen, because that well-being (well-being at the adult's community level) is reflected in child's well-being. '

Multidimensional understanding of inclusion

Inclusion was interpreted in many ways, and its interpretation seemed not to be self-evident or easy. Value consideration was noted to be significant.

'When defining inclusion, many start from the value basis.'

The teachers' disciplinary background was highlighted when talking about the understanding the inclusion, and the implementation of inclusion teaching.

'The first thing I came across when I was doing that mapping from the point of view of inclusivity. The concept was reflected in our doctrine in three courses. When you asked teachers to put their own teaching content and a little was opened, what type of inclusivity

could be such as consideration, diversity and cultural diversity of students, then there were a lot of those inclusivity-related values. There, equality was brought, equality, both at the curriculum level and in the content of teaching.

The perspective of special pedagogy was stressed in many respects.

'In the subject of special education/special pedagogy, inclusivity is as if inscribed into studies.'

The special education perspective was also emphasized in other programmes, whereas the considerations regarding the children's socio-economic background differences were not as stressed. However, this phenomenon was discussed in many courses, in slightly various ways in the universities and programmes.

Besides the strong special education viewpoint, the diversity and superdiversity issues were taught in the courses that related to the inclusion.

There was much debate about the possible borderlines of the concept of inclusion. What does using the concept bring and what does it potentially prevent? Alternative conceptual ways of approaching the field of phenomena were brought to light as the following excerpt illustrates.

'As a researcher, I am interested in coming to the debate through the concept of belonging. I've experienced maybe getting out of those burdens that come from having so many starting points to come and discuss. It sometimes has the consequences that people are not talking about the same thing. Through the study of belonging and, by extension, coming to very different levels, one can have an inclusion in the ultimate question, every person's experience.'

How is the child understood in the inclusive transitions

The vocabulary characterizing the child seemed to vary as described in the following extract.

'In ECEC ja pre-primary education they talk about the child, in primary education about the pupil.'

Such vocabulary differences originate from the history of each institution. As such they do not express how the child or pupil is understood. The following dimensions describing the child appeared in the focus group discussions.

New, sometimes contradictory expectations

'A lot of expectations, talk about competences, assessment begins to start - on the other hand a playing actor.'

Emphasis on children's voice and involvement in the transition process

'The aspect of childhood research is seen in our unit, also listening to the child and the study and experiences of children also in transitional situations, child's play in transitional situations.'

Child as a member of the family

'But on the other hand, this family study and the fact that the child is not removed from that family, we have had discussions here, I'm sure you can see our own research work in our constructions. This means that in these transition situations the role of families is significant.'

Childhood as a historical-cultural phenomenon, child construction as part of this

'What does a child's position look like at different times. I always try to say that now we understand the position of the child, so always be aware of what time is lived and what things should be promoted. '

Age categorizations and child construction

'People interpret differently to whom early childhood education is targeted, in some expressions, children under three years of age are excluded. And administrative reforms, they interpret these things by defining for example the age boarder of pre-primary education. The impression that those children who are not in pre-primary education are positioned differently, not equally. This produces inequality. Such issues as when the learning begins, and the the learner are forgotten because of the subject. '

The excerpt illustrates the typical dilemmas in Finnish public and sometimes also in professional talk related to the expectations of the children's competence or needs in certain age.

How are professional collaboration issues considered in the curricula and pedagogical practices?

Regarding the professional collaboration between the various degrees, programmes and teachers, there is a desire for joint teaching beyond training programmes and qualifications, but its implementation is described as challenging. Collaboration may be hampered by practical issues such as the timing of studies (the timing of the practice periods) in different programmes. Sometimes also the desire of students to work in workshop groups according to their own degree education or educational pathway.

How are transition issues involved in the practice periods?

'In our ECEC teacher programme we cannot guarantee everyone a pre-primary education practice period and the involvement in the transition situations (referring to the vertical transition from pre-primary education to primary education). '

The above-mentioned extract illustrates well a mindset that constructs the transition as a specific event that dates to a specific time of the year. In the discussions such mindset was also challenged by referring to the municipal level practices that consider the transition more as a process

'There are transition projects in some municipalities where our students have their practice periods. In these cases, students get good models for collaboration, which is done regularly. '

3.2 Focus-group meetings with the former students

To investigate students' study experiences of the inclusive transition topic, teachers who had graduated from universities less than three years ago were interviewed. The interviews were focused on the following issues:

1. *How do the former teacher students describe their studies regarding inclusive transitions?*
2. *How do the former teacher students evaluate the pre-service training from the working life demanding perspectives?*

Conducting the interviews with the beginning teachers

Former early childhood teacher students, primary school teacher students and special education teacher students, teachers less than three years after graduation and those who were working less than three years after graduation were invited to participate in the study via social media. The invitation on

social media was made in cooperation with the Finnish teachers' trade union. The invitation was posted on the trade union's Facebook group as well as in the early childhood education teachers Facebook group. An introductory text of the study and a link where participants could read details of data protection was published on social media by the trade union. Participants provided their contact details via the link after the participants had been informed about the study. After being contacted, participants were asked for their actual consent, after they had been told additional information about the study and participants had the opportunity to ask specific questions about the study.

Participants were asked their consent to participate in a focus group discussion conducted in zoom. Two interviews and one explanatory focus-group meetings were organized in March and April 2022. The intention was to organize focus-group discussions alone. However, due to scheduling challenges, it was mandatory to organize additional individual interviews. Eventually, two individual interviews (2 x 1 h) and one focus-group discussion (1 h) were held.

A total of five former students participated in the study. All participants were united by the fact that less than three years had elapsed since they graduated with a Bachelor of Education and an early childhood education teacher or master's degree and a primary school teacher or a special education teacher. In this study, the ECEC teacher is used as an abridged version of an early childhood education teacher who works as a pre-primary teacher. They had been employed as qualified teachers for less than three years. In addition, some of the study participants had other degrees, such as the education of a nursery nurse. Participants had graduated from different universities.

Key themes

The results consisted of five main themes:

1. The theme of professionals' daily life – writing children's learning forms guide transition practices and work-processes
2. The theme of children in transition – changes, continuity, and excitement
3. The theme of studies - minor studies in pre- and primary education as prime knowledge
4. The theme of inclusive transition – inclusion as a value and integration of special or intensified need children
5. The theme of collaboration in studies

Before the actual themes, we briefly describe how the participants considered the concept of transition. In the interviews and in the discussions, the experiences of education and working life were intertwined. In some situations, separating them seemed to be challenging.

Understanding the transition – transition as one moment instead of process

In describing participants understanding of the transition, they brought up the one moment when the child goes to another group or institution. Below are presented excerpts of how the transition was understood. Typically, transition is seen as one moment (not a process) when the child goes to another institution or group. The child is described here as a traveler moving in transition from one group or institution to another without the aspect of preparation for the environment. The child is seen in this passive role, having no active role or voice in his or her own transition process.

'I describe it in the way that transition is what happens at the point when the child moves either from one group to another or from one institution to another. The transition can also be at the point of moving, not necessarily forward on the education path, but transversely when switching to ECEC center, moving elsewhere.' (P1, ECEC-teacher)

Premises and cultural changes

When interviewees talked about children and transition, they spoke specifically from the perspective of premises and the perspective of cultural changes and continuity. They described that the transition is easier to conduct if pre-primary education and primary education are in located the same building. This was mentioned several times. Such location has been assessed also as successful for the cooperation. Teachers describe how physical distance and premises are meaningful in the transition, whereby it is said that the biggest change in transitions for children is the premises and places of different institutions. In addition, it is described below that the transition is then much easier if the school is nearby. Similarly, it is described as easier for cooperation to succeed when professionals are in the same premise. The excerpt below describes how the aim of professionals' cooperation is to give children a feeling of familiarity with the premises. For example, pedagogical meanings or learning continuum meanings in transition are missing from the description.

'What immediately comes to mind is the child's perspective on the whole transition. It's an important transition, after all. When you think about transitioning from pre-primary to primary school. If school is even a little further away, it's like a new world. I've seen that if the school is very close, then the transition is much easier. Professionals can cooperate a little more in the pre-primary year, for example, to get children acquainted with the facilities.' (P2 ECEC-teacher and studying special education teacher)

Although transition as a concept was described as the child's perspective for transition, this description did not include talk about child-centered transitions, family perspective, or the child's active role in their own transition process.

Theme of professionals' daily life – Written forms guide professionals' transition practices and work-processes

When discussed transition from the perspective of institutional practices, it was described as filling out various forms of knowledge transfer. In Finland, a personal learning plan is made for each child in pre-primary education. In addition, children in need of special support undergo a pedagogical assessment and support. When former students were asked what transition-related studies they remember or what kind of transition practices exist, the discussion turned to the processes of transferring knowledge and filling in forms. Pre-primary teachers described processes and practices related to transitions through forms used for knowledge transfer.

' When the pre-primary year begins, local events for pre-primary teachers are held in municipalities. They go through the annual plan and instructions by which time to have certain forms filled in. And who those docs need to be sent to and it's a super confusing system.' (P1, ECEC-teacher)

The pre-primary teacher's working year is described to be full of filling of forms and the experiences of hurry when filling children's personal learning plan forms were expressed. The transition is seen as a future event involving the responsibility of the pre-primary unit to know where to send the child and what is written in the forms about the child.

'Schedules come fast. Application forms must be ready by the end of the fall term. It means that you immediately start thinking about what kind of support is needed when the child starts in pre-primary education. You don't even have time to get to know the child. So, you immediately start thinking about that upcoming transition' (P1, ECEC-teacher)

Collaboration and knowledge transfer work better face-face-communication than on paper

The interviewees shared the ideas of collaboration and knowledge transfer between professionals and collaboration with parents.

'If communication doesn't really work. If it is solely for one form, then educational work and knowledge of that child will be wasted. It is our responsibility to make sure the message goes to the school.' (P1, ECEC teacher)

'Now that we're in the same building as the school. We have a very informal procedure. We'll talk. Of course, we cannot, as people, talk about children. But we can talk about what kind of children we have on a general level. Today, was the last time one asked. We were in the same break room. Such a very informal process without documentation. That's how I've best gotten transferred information.' (P1, ECEC teacher)

There was also a point of view that it is important for the school to contact the pre-primary and be interested in the information about children who do not have any need for support. Occasionally, interviewees felt that collaborative proposals more often start from the pre-primary teachers' side.

'There has also been talk about the fact that the school should be connecting to us. Also ask information for all children not just about demanding special support children.' (P5, ECEC teacher)

The theme of children in transition – changes, continuity, and excitement

Some of the former students had views that the child is at the center of transition practices and described how the transition to primary school changes children's everyday lives. This description delves a little deeper into the child's world and looks at how everyday life around the child changes and how the child should adapt to the new environment, but also how the surrounding adults and professionals' collaboration can help in the process. An example of this is seen in the following quote:

'I wondered when it was mentioned that transition is only seen as knowledge transfer. So, indeed, that child will shift, and the child's pre-school life will also shift. We have had a lot of talk with colleagues about when a child moves from pre-primary to primary school side. What does change in everyday structuring look like from the child's perspective? How could the change in everyday structuring be smoother with the help of collaboration between professionals?' (P4, ECEC- and primary school teacher)

In the following example, the teacher describes how the child has described himself in the future in relation to the new environment. The teacher's description involves how the child's perception of oneself changes and how the child experiences and thinks about the future transition together with others when children use the language 'we go' and we become first graders. The teacher has noticed how transitioning for the child is also a communal experience and an exciting change.

'The transition is terribly exciting from a child's point of view. You can see that excitement in spring. Children in pre-primary will notice that 'we go over there on the other side of the road'. Actually, we just have a forest in between. Somehow it becomes concrete in the spring that 'we are about to become first graders'. I see it as terribly important for the child. Let's make physical premises familiar to the child, but also the fact that that child meets future first-class teacher. The child gets the idea that what happens there in the first class. We have good cooperation with primary school, or I have always experienced it working.' (P3, ECEC teacher, master's degree)

From the child's perspective, the meaning of continuity was identified. Sometimes children might have negative expectations and concerns, with the main reference leaving behind friends (separation) and teachers with whom they were familiar. In the example below, the continuity was recognized in the situation if the child sees a former pre-primary teacher in the same premise. The continuity was described especially if the pre-primary and school were in the same premises. Being in the same premise was before described as a possibility with better opportunities for professional collaboration. The continuity of familiar professionals from the child's point of view was described as how the child saw their former pre-primary teacher in their everyday life. On the one hand, it was described here that continuity is built if the pre-primary and primary school classes are in the same buildings. However, the pedagogical continuum and cooperation defined in curricula, for example, do not depend on premises. This example does not describe from the child's point of view how else continuity could be built than by being in the same premises.

'I hear it makes it a little easier for children when pre-primary school is next to the first class and there is also a familiar staff. I see (first class) children almost every day as we walk by. It's been feeling like the start has been a little easier for them.' (P1, ECEC teacher)

The theme of studies – optional studies in pre- and primary education as prime knowledge

Former students described how they do not have specific memories of transition-related studies in compulsory studies. However, they addressed in their talk many themes relevant from the transition perspective. Thus, the question arises whether former students may not recognize themes related to transitions in their studies unless courses are named in accordance with the transition. The following example describes how transition-related studies are linked to how the transition should be implemented in working life.

'Honestly, I don't think I remember anything that would have specifically addressed how the transition to school takes place' (P1, ECEC teacher)

The following example highlights how the pre-primary teacher describes as having learned in education that it would be important for future school professionals to communicate with pre-primary to understand how children have a valuable history before primary school. On the one hand, a culture-historical mindset can be seen here, and on the other hand, appreciation (or lack of appreciation) of another institution:

'Mostly what I remember, are lectures about how easily are thought in schools that children pop into the world when they are seven years old. We should take care and remind people

there (in primary school) how those children have a long period of time in their lives before school. (P1, ECEC teacher)

The optional studies as well as the practice periods seemed to be significant for understanding the transition.

'Your own choices mattered. I had it as an optional study (pre-primary- and primary school teaching), then maybe more knowledge came from there. There were also collaborations with primary school teacher students. However, when I think about it, so quite a minimal amount has been. All that experience or knowledge has come from practical work.' (P2, ECEC teacher and studying to be a special education teacher)

However, the optional studies in various universities vary. Thus, also the experiences the former students varied. Beyond collaboration, value discussions about how cooperation is essential were described as an important part of the studies.

'I don't think of any specific course that would have focused on this collaboration. Of course, all our basic studies are joint with the primary school teachers. (--) I do not remember that it is precisely the cooperation between pre-primary and primary education or how it is done in practice. I do not remember having received any information about it. More through hands-on work experience. But in value talk in university studies, I remember that cooperation between pre- and primary education is important. But how does it appear in practice? I do not remember that there was a talk about it.' (P3, ECEC teacher and primary school teacher)

The theme of inclusive transition – inclusion as a value and integration of special or intensified need children

Inclusive transition practices were described from a special education perspective and integration of special support children into mainstream education classes. In addition, inclusive practices were described as the participation of children with special or intensified support. Everyone repeated that there has been a lot of talk about inclusion during studies.

'There was a lot of talk about participation and if any child needs a little support, then how does he benefit from it. He gets to be inclusively involved in the activity.' (P5, ECEC teacher)

'I remember that there was a lot of talk about it and the fact that children with special or intensified needs are placed in mainstream education classes. This may have been like a hot potato, which I remember from the time I studied myself. There is still some talk and different opinions about it. I've chatted nowadays about that topic with class teachers and in early childhood education. There are different opinions.' (P3, ECEC teacher, master's degree)

Some of the students described the value discussion in the context of inclusion. Values like equality and equivalence were mentioned.

'When we talk here in Finland that inclusion is impeded by lack of resources. There is not enough support and there are not enough hands, there are not enough people. When we had compared even with the South African unit, the biggest obstacle to inclusion lies in our mindset.' (P4, ECEC teacher and primary school teacher)

'We professionals and future professionals were put in to consider inclusion from different perspectives. In terms of everyday life, what has been the original idea about it? Why is inclusion being raised? What's the gist of it? Equality and equivalence of all people. However, not forgetting everyday life. (—) This was a turning course for me.' (P4, ECEC and primary school teacher)

Inclusive Transitions in Teacher Training Practice periods

When discussing the practice period experiences with inclusive transitions, the conversation shifted again to knowledge transfer discussions and forms. A visit to special education group was also mentioned. Inclusivity was described as transition practices for children who need special support.

'Yeah, there was talk about parent-professional partnership. About the forms, when there was a teacher training practice course, certainly depends on the training instructor. Who wanted to introduce learning plan documents. I had the instructor who at least show the forms and I got in on the learning conversation. This should be emphasized to the teacher training instructor. Talk about these, specifically about collaboration practices. Because you don't go through these at the university otherwise. It should be part of the studies how to do this. Kind of brings it up, you can have different views in every municipality. That they do not use the same forms and do not have the same practices.' (P1, ECEC teacher)

The students' experience of what they learned most about inclusivity in their studies was raised in the special education teacher studies. In addition, the student shares the insight that inclusivity belongs to each professional. As regards the studies of an early childhood education teacher, no significant learning experience had been left in the student's mind.

'I have gained a lot of knowledge about inclusion in special education teacher studies. My master thesis is concerned with inclusive practices. I have learned very little in early childhood education studies about this theme, but yeah, it's kind of like in our heads and mindsets. It's something that concerns all of us.' (P2, ECEC teacher and studying to be a special education teacher)

The theme of collaboration in studies

University studies were not described to have themes about cooperation with parents specifically from the transition perspectives. In the following excerpt, cooperation with parents is seen first and foremost from the perspective of the learning conversation. The example below also refers to the children's learning forms and it is described that cooperation with parents involves a discussion based on the forms.

'We did not study how to do an early childhood education learning conversation with parents. And I think that it doesn't make sense either, because each municipality has different kind of practices. Each municipality has different forms.' (P1, ECEC teacher)

In contrast, the importance of parent-professional partnership was clear, and interviewees were able to connect that theme to the transition.

More interaction between different groups of teachers is needed in studies

All interviewees expressed that there was not much collaboration between different groups of teachers during their studies. Interviewees described that it would be useful in working life if you were used to cooperate with other groups of teachers during the study period.

'There should be collaboration between different groups of teachers, different groups studying to be a teacher. If there's an opportunity to be in the same room at a lecture. The university could encourage cooperation during studies. It would be important to learn that communication at that point. Then later in working life, when you are in different buildings then, it will be much more difficult to learn how to communicate.' (P1, ECEC teacher)

'That interaction between these groups of teachers would be important. I remember one single course, no... I mean two courses where I actively cooperated with another group of teachers.' (P1, ECEC teacher)

3.3. A summary based on the key focus group discussion and interview findings

In the written curricula documents, the contents are typically generally expressed. Therefore, the expressions in which the concept of transition appears are very rare. However, the university representatives' descriptions about the implemented pedagogical contents and practices indicates that the phenomenon is taught and studied in many courses. Still, the coordination within the certain degree and between degrees is comparatively slight. Thus, written curricula seem to form a relatively loose framework for teaching practices.

Among other things, the following issues relevant to how the curriculum is implemented in everyday teaching practices were raised: the teacher of course, his or her own orientation on the phenomenon in question, possible research on the subject as well as the projects underway or implemented at universities and institutes and, more broadly, the research emphasis of the university unit.

Inclusive transitions were considered in multiple ways both in the discussions with university representatives and in the interviews with the former students. The theoretical perspectives to consider transitions were many (pedagogical, psychological, cooperation orientation, etc.) Also, the inclusion perspectives were many (for example special education and support for children with special needs - orientation; universalism and equity -orientation; multicultural and super diversity -orientation).

In the former students' interviews inclusion was equated with the integration and participation of children who needed support. There was a special pedagogical perspective in that description. Most of the teachers had special education studies on inclusion and inclusive practices. These courses and studies were well identified and remembered in the interviews. On the other hand, equality was identified as the value of inclusion, but children from diverse backgrounds, for example, were not discussed in the context of inclusion.

Cooperation between teacher groups was described only in minor subject or optional studies. Teachers suggested that cooperation between groups of teachers should be given attention in compulsory studies, thereby making it easier to initiate cooperation also at work.

In the former students' descriptions of their daily transition practices, issues of filling out knowledge transfer forms were emphasized - the transition was seen as if through the processes of filling out forms. Former students identified the importance of interaction in the construction of shared knowledge and evaluated face-to-face interaction being better than knowledge transferred on paper.

However, the conversation turned repeatedly to filling out forms.

When talking about the teaching practice periods, the former students once again highlighted the working with various kinds of forms as well as the conversations with parents regarding the child's learning plan. The studies were evaluated to lack content related to transitions — the topic was described to have emphasis only in minor subject studies, especially minor subject studies related to pre- and primary education.

3.4 Documenting inspiring examples

This section describes some examples of inspiring teaching practices based on the university representatives focus group discussions.

When talking about revision or improving the current practices, a shared wish related to joint teaching.

'The continuity comes in that all teacher groups involved. All get acquainted with the key contents of other educational stages and environments. For example, it is significant to have the same criteria for documentation and writing individual learning plans. This emphasizes continuity '

This shared goal has been implemented in various ways. The following list describes some examples of the courses that have been evaluated to be inspiring.

- Multidisciplinary courses which examine challenging situations in a multidisciplinary manner. The participants of those courses may be lawyer students, social work students, or teacher students etc.
- Jointly constructed courses in the context of various research or development projects, where students can identify the perspectives of other professionals or institutions.
- A joint course in which information transfer and shared language related to cooperation and documentation are taught for example by using conversation simulation and other methods.

Utilizing the contribution of childhood studies was also mentioned when talking about inspiring examples.

'We have had researchers who have been interested in childhood studies –orientation. Long ago it was recognized that in the primary teachers' programme it is not well recognized the time before the Yellow Cap (some companies fund a yellow cap for all first-grade children to avoid traffic accidents) and where the school children come from. We built a course called Childhood as a social and cultural phenomenon and all the primary teacher students took it. It was really rewarding. The feedback was good. '

In addition, a longer practice period, where practical experience can also be gained from the transition and cooperation between pre-primary and primary education, was planned to implement in one university unit.

4 Conclusion and recommendations

The baseline study report illustrates that the inclusive transition is not well enough involved in the university curricula texts and the pedagogical practices implementing the written curricula. It is evident that there still are a wide range of institutional boundaries that may cause difficulties if aiming to build a shared understanding, knowledge and language for the further collaborators. However, the strong

wish to build the common understanding seems to be clear, but daily life brings many practical, discipline-based, and historical boundaries to cross.

Inclusive transitions were considered in multiple ways. The theoretical perspectives to consider transitions were many (pedagogical, psychological, cooperation orientation, etc.) Also, the inclusion perspectives were many (for example special education –support for children with special needs – orientation; universalism and equity –orientation; multicultural and super diversity –orientation). For the university representatives and former students, the implementation of the transition phenomenon appeared in a different light. The university teachers considered the transition as a broad, above-described multidisciplinary phenomenon, but the former students had more practical views, mainly based on the minor studies and work experience. As noticed also in other Finnish InTrans work package contexts, inclusive transition is often considered from the special education, vertical and working with the standard knowledge transfer forms perspectives. These considerations can be seen also in the former students' interviews.

The participants suggested that both transition and inclusion concepts should be more explicitly defined and discussed in the curricula revision processes. Such discussion could help the university community to become more aware of the colleagues' knowledge and ideas and to construct a shared understanding about the transition phenomenon. It could also help the teachers to formulate the aims and content as well as the teaching practices of each course addressed the phenomenon. By having such a shared understanding, the teachers could also help the students to understand the position of each course in the transition entity. For the teachers, such a broader view would be helpful when planning the implementation of each course. In all, this would give space for multidisciplinary and multidimensional understanding about the transition.

Even if the transition was understood as a broad and multidimensional phenomenon that cannot be reduced to the simple transition word, the transition concept was recommended to use more in the written curricula texts.

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