

## **Curriculum of Preschool Education: Swedish Approach**

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### **Abstract**

*There is a wide consensus among the education specialists and scientists that early experience is the prime time for children to establish the foundation for future learning and intellectual growth. It is claimed that early intervention affects the development of the brain and lays the base for cognitive, emotional and also moral development. For the brain, a stimulus is a sine qua non! The timing when the brain is exposed to stimuli is extremely critical. The success of Swedish preschool education has been acknowledged by many authorities. The Swedish tradition of preschool emphasizes the importance of play in a child's development and learning. The interests and needs of children are key components of their education in the preschool curriculum. The purpose of this article is to discuss the importance of having preschool education for children to develop their cognitive, affective social and psychomotor characteristics. In this paper cross cultural examples together with the main characteristics of Swedish preschool approach have been presented with a view to inspiring curriculum developers.*

**Keywords:** Preschool Education, Early Childhood Education, Swedish Preschool Education

### **1. Introduction**

Preschool education is crucial since the first definitions, the very first life experiences, the first stimuli a child is exposed to matter a lot. We now know that the human brain has approximately 100 billion neurons at birth. Each neuron has the potential to connect to the other 10,000 neurons and this means about 1 billion potential connections. A new connection between brain cells and new neuron-networks to be established is called learning. The human brain weighs on average 1.36 kg and comprises only 2% of the human body. However, it consumes more than 20% of the oxygen and nutrients that the body intakes. It is observed that by the time a child is 3 years old, a baby's brain has formed about 1,000 trillion connections (almost about twice as many as adults have). As of age 11, a child's brain prunes unused connections. As the synapses in a child's brain are strengthened through repeated experiences, neuron-networking is formed. In other words, the connections which emerged as a result of environmental stimulus establish the foundation for further learning and the perception of the outside world for the learner. If any of those connections are not used then they are eliminated/pruned based on the "use it or lose it" principle. The more the connections are used repeatedly, especially during the early years, the more they become permanent. The prime example for this phenomenon would be picking up one's native language (Juan, 2011).

The process of formation of a human brain is a complex phenomenon. This phenomenon happens continuously. Learners construct their conceptions of the world from their own experience, building on previous conceptions. The timing when the brain is exposed to stimuli is extremely critical. In other words, the effect of the stimuli which the brain is exposed to during the first periods after birth is not the same as the effect of the stimuli received during adulthood. There is a consensus among the scientists that there are critical stages or prime times when the brain is ready to absorb new information and develop new skills more easily than at other times. While this is true especially in the first three years of life, it continues throughout early childhood and adolescence. This is especially applicable to learning languages, numerical skills and developing certain kinds of skills like playing a musical instrument. Learning can occur at later times but, it usually is slower and more difficult during the adulthood as compared to childhood. Therefore, providing children with the best learning opportunities during these critical times is crucial.

For example, the "prime time" for visual and auditory development is from birth to up to 6 years old. The development of these sensory capacities via being exposed to various stimuli is very important for allowing children, especially babies, to perceive and interact with the world around them. During the first few months, especially, babies need to hear a language and see shapes, colors and objects. Those stimuli are so vital that they determine the way the brain takes shapes and neuron-networking to be formed. Therefore, it can be safely stated that "first years last forever" (Newquist, 2004).

The purpose of this article is to discuss the importance of having preschool education for children to develop their cognitive, affective social and psychomotor characteristics. Cross cultural examples have been presented to see the effect(s) of preschool programs on the performance of children in their later school life in different cultures. Finally, the main characteristics of Swedish preschool approach have been examined with a view to inspiring curriculum developers.

## **2. Theoretical Framework: Preschool Curriculum & Preschool Children**

By the time children arrive at a preschool setting, they have already had a variety of learning experiences and have developed different kinds of attitudes towards different situations, formed some ideas about themselves, had fears and joys in a number of ways. In order to build upon the learning that has taken place in the home and its immediate environment, adults should provide children with a rich variety of learning activities and experiences in an stimulating and challenging way. The main focus must be to allow children to learn without experiencing a sense of failure. When children start their pre-school education, they already bring a variety of personal and social skills, values and attitudes together with them. Most of those characteristics have been shaped by their experiences acquired at home and immediate environment. Those values and characteristics must be the starting point for their education and they must be recognized and fostered. Children do not enter schools like empty vessels to be filled. They have their own personalities, preferences, likes and dislikes and so on. Some are timid while others are extrovert. At times some are protective and at other times aggressive; some prefer to lead, others to follow. Young children need time for relationships to develop. Being aware that they are valued as individuals enhances children's self-esteem and makes it easier for them to form relationships and develop friendships (DENI, 1997).

### **2.1 Main characteristics of preschool children:**

- They seem to be interested in themselves and their immediate environment. They have a curious nature and have the motivation to explore, question and investigate things.
- They like being recognized and praised.
- On the whole they are quite sociable and ready to establish good relationships not only with their peers but also with adults. They are still in the process of developing self-esteem and self-confidence. Some of them would prefer to play and work in groups while others to do that alone. A few of them may show some kind of signs of leadership.
- They like being in control as well as adult guidance.
- Most of them would enjoy stories, rhymes, dancing and music.
- They would like the opportunity to voice their opinions and set their own rules.
- They have natural curiosity to be fostered (Segal and et al, 2006).
- Children at that age are kinesthetic.

### **2.2 First Things First: Basic needs of preschool children**

- We must make sure that the school must be totally safe and should follow "Health & Safety" rules and regulations.
- Balanced and healthy diet must be provided. This is very crucial at their age especially for the physical and brain development.
- Children need a sense of independence as well as adult supervision.
- Children need stimulating and challenging learning environment.
- Children need space and fresh air for their physical and mental development.
- Well-planned learning activities must be in place to help children develop sense of achievement and social skills.

- Plenty of learning opportunities must be incorporated into the preschool curriculum for the children to develop presentation skills as well as social ones.
- Learning opportunities must be in place for them to develop positive attitudes towards learning and learning process. It is equally important for them to develop constructive attitudes towards their peers and adults.
- We need to get the balance right in terms of indoor and outdoor activities.
- There must be an ample number of opportunities for storytelling, music and dancing activities while paying special attention to meal times. In relation to that percussion instruments could be used and we should also give them opportunities to respond freely to music through movement and mime.
- Adequate time should be allowed to each child to make sure that each and every one of them achieves the planned goals and objectives.
- The needs of children with regard to their cognitive, affective, social and psychomotor must be taken into account during curriculum development process.

Children like exploring a variety of materials, getting familiarized with different color, shape, texture and sound. They should be given plenty of opportunities and also be encouraged to express their ideas, communicate their feelings and more importantly use their imagination. Most children like drawing pictures. Those pictures become more detailed compared to initial ones as their ability to concentrate increases. As children grow up, they develop psychomotor skills by using and handling appropriate tools and instruments. We need to praise their pictures and other kinds of work. Children also begin to value their own and other children's work.

### **2.3 Curriculum development**

Different countries and different governments interpret the concept of curriculum in a number of different ways. Some puts the emphasis on the learner while others give priority to the needs of the society and/or the body of knowledge to be absorbed. Literal meaning of "curriculum" comes from a Latin word "currere" which means "a course to be run". A number of different definitions and understandings of the notion of curriculum can be found in the literature. For example, Tanner and Tanner (1975) claim that curriculum means planned instructional experience designed to help learners develop, grow and extend individual capability. Generally speaking curriculum development process involves planning, implementation and evaluation of learning experiences for students to have and to engage in. During the stipulation of the curriculum development process, one should think about the needs of the society, individual and the knowledge to be developed by the learner. There are different approaches and models of developing curriculum and curriculum design in the literature. However, it can be safely stated that the following are considered to be the main four components of a curriculum design:

1. Objectives,
2. Subject Matter & Content,
3. Learning Experiences,
4. Evaluation procedures.

Whichever approach preferred as a curriculum development, we must pay special attention to the fact that curriculum development is a process and is very much dynamic in nature. It means that we need to keep reviewing it in light of the feedback we get from all sources; children themselves, parents, teachers and so on. Therefore, in order to create a quality pre-school curriculum with all its components like mentioned above, we need to have a mechanism to observe children at play and review and evaluate the curriculum accordingly in a systematic manner. Feedback gathered during the process is needed to adjust the difficulty level of the activities (not too simple or not too difficult) so that the learning environment is challenging, rich and interesting for the children (Wiles, 2009).

### **2.4 Main points to be kept in mind for the success of the curriculum**

- We need to make sure that the range of learning activities is wide and broad enough to offer rich learning opportunities.
- Feedback gathering mechanism must be in place so that we can constantly observe the progress of each child.
- There must be suitable and carefully selected materials in line with the learning opportunities.

- We need to be careful in terms of the difficulty level of the learning activities. We must avoid the possibility of developing a sense of “learned helplessness” while making sure that the tasks are challenging for preschool children.
- We also need to get the balance right in terms of cognitive, affective, social and physical needs of the children while at the planning and implementation stages of preschool curriculum.
- In addition to basic skills, we need to incorporate process skills into the curriculum.
- Presentation and social skills should not be neglected as they are very important for their future life.
- There must be learning opportunities for children to be co-operative, patient, respect other children and living things, confident enough to take initiative, sharing, being imaginative, able to take measures against possible accidents (sense of awareness), clean and be aware of hygiene, independent, caring for others as well as being aware of their own feelings.

In addition to the above we must not forget that children need a lot of space to do physical activities. Most children have fun doing physical activities both indoors and outdoors. This is needed for them to develop fine and large motor skills, eye-hand coordination skills. Through physical activities children also develop self-confidence and self-awareness. At the same time, children learn social skills as they co-operate with each other and show consideration for one another. Well planned physical activities can also influence other areas of children’s learning, for example, it gives children a sense of size and space. We need to select a wide variety of appropriate small and large equipment. These are needed to provide children with opportunities to extend their skills for example, running, hopping, jumping, climbing, balancing, throwing and catching. Those activities must be well-planned so that interest is sustained, challenge is offered and activities are balanced to provide for individual needs and abilities.

For the development of fine and large motor skills. We can utilize a variety of simple and complex activities such as; button doll’s clothes, screw on lids, pour water into narrow-necked bottles, use scissors to cut various kinds of material, engage them to do jig-saws and so on.

Lots of drawing and painting activities must be incorporated into the curriculum as well. In addition to its obvious contributions to develop fine and large motor skills, these activities are so precious in terms of developing a sense of aesthetic awareness. Such learning experiences also give them the opportunity to express themselves so that children experience the joy of achievement.

Review of the curriculum at every stage namely; planning, implementation and evaluation is a must to ensure having a dynamic master plan. As mentioned above it is important to make children feel that they are in control during the learning process. However, as stated beautifully in the DENI report (1997) adults’ involvement seems to be required under the below given circumstances:

- When children would like to invite you to play with them.
- When children seek advice and assistance;
- When there is a need to settle a dispute;
- When children might be in danger.

Creative methods must be utilized like drama in education. Role taking especially can be very effective. Real life situations can always be simulated via drama. In addition to that we must also think about interesting educational activities to help children learn while they have fun during the process. Following are some practical learning activities for preschool children:

- Collect seeds: you can find them inside the fruits and vegetables or outside from trees and flowers. Nuts from trees are usually fun to collect for many kids. Later on, children could be asked to wrap those collected seeds in paper towels that have been soaked in water. Children would enjoy observing the seeds over a period of time to see the developments.
- Map making: you can make different kinds of maps with the children. This map could be the one about the garden, house or even the near buildings. You can use pictures and various shapes representing the objects or simple drawings. Those completed maps can be hung up on the wall with the pictures/names of the children.

- Use a mirror: you can always play with the children in front of a mirror making faces and/or moving your body in different ways. You can also ask the children if they see any other objects that reflect lights like metal spoons and shiny furniture.
- Measuring distance: you can always ask children about the distance between desks, chairs, buildings and other objects. They can be creative using steps, ropes and so on for the measurement.
- Parachutes: Children like plying with parachutes. To make a simple parachute you can use string, shopping bags, and someweights like a stone. Once you make a working parachute, you can use different sizes of bags for bigger ones and try different heights for simple experiments. You can also try different lengths of string to see what combination makes an even better parachute.

The above examples are just given to provoke thoughts about coming up with creative activities that would be appealing to children. Another example would be, instead of taking regular attendance by reading out the names of children and expect them to respond verbally. You can always read out a name and the child whose name has just been called out run across the room to ring a bell which had been placed there earlier by the teacher. This would be a good morning physical exercise.

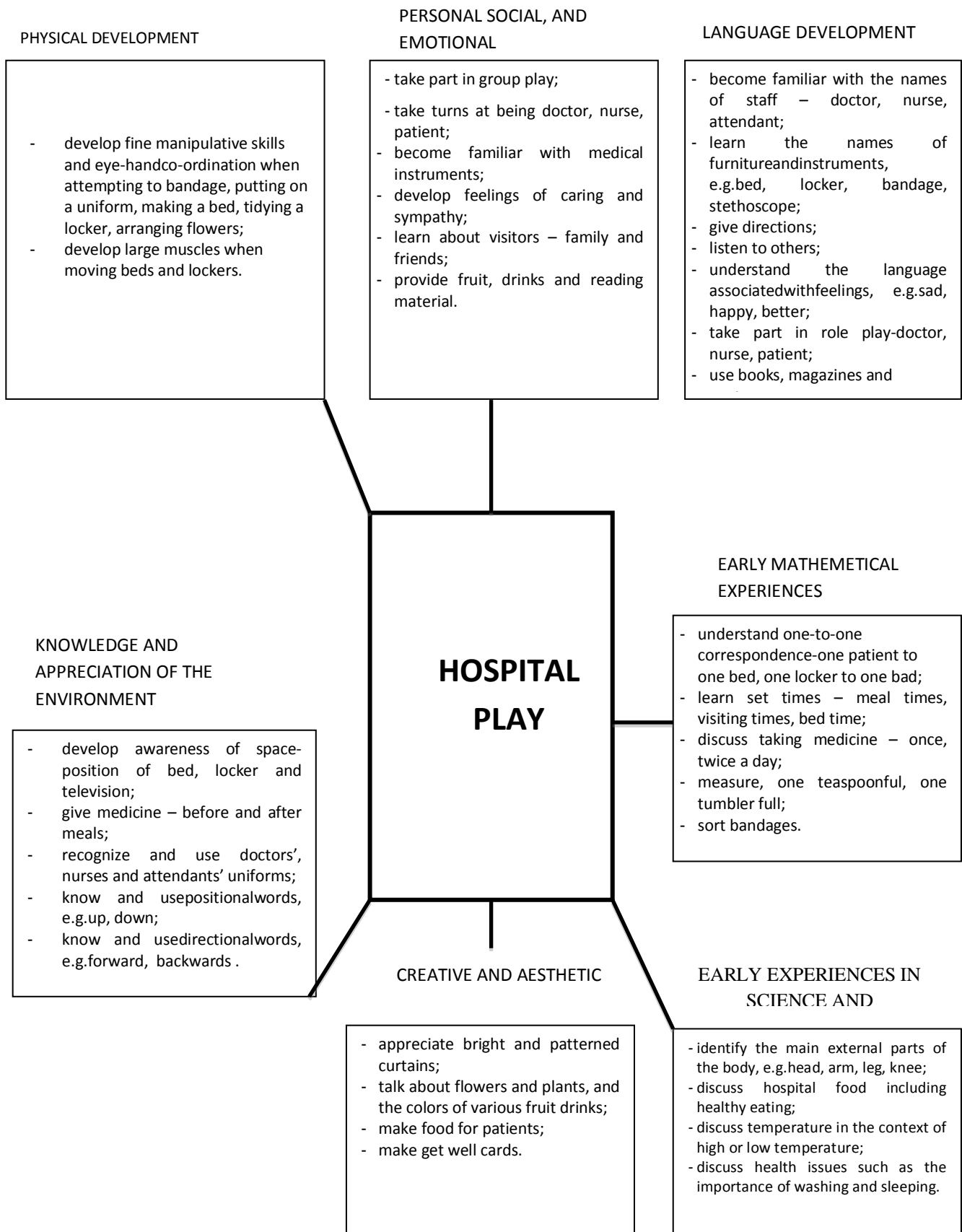
Curriculum planners and teachers should pay special attention to the notion of equality of opportunity for girls and boys, children coming from different races and cultures, and also to the needs of children requiring special support. We must keep in mind that children's first educators are their parents. The experiences children have at home form the basis of further learning in the pre-school setting. Therefore, we should regard the parents as our partners. It is important that there is a kind of continuous dialogue between parents and the teachers and school managers. We, as educators, need to develop a good rapport with the parents so that they would share relevant information about their children. Similar to that, parents also need to be informed about the progress of their children. This kind of healthy relationship must be maintained until children graduate.

There are four main domains that we need to think about when we plan the curriculum; 1. Cognitive 2. Affective 3. Social 4. Psychomotor. Curriculum developers should incorporate learning opportunities under those domains so that the needs of children are met in a holistic way (UNESCO, 2002).

We all live in a society and it is very important for the children to communicate with other people and be able to express their opinions and feelings. In that sense, special attention must be given to language skills to be developed. It is crucial to have a rich repertoire of concepts and vocabulary since they influence the way human beings think and also important in terms of conversational skills. We also use language as a means of obtaining new information from outside world. It is equally important for children to become active listeners as well as having communicative skills (both verbal and non-verbal). Those skills are needed to be developed and fostered in preschool children. To that end, creative drama in education, ICT (well-stocked library of CDs and DVDs), role-playing, open-ended Socratic questions and similar methods can be employed effectively. We must not force or even encourage preschool children to read and write at this stage since we may fall into the trap of causing the development of a sense of helplessness in them or damage their self-confidence due to difficulty level of the tasks. However, pre-writing activities through games can be included into the curriculum by using symbols and patterns. Children like and respond to stories, nursery rhymes, poems, jingles and songs. We can always capitalize on their natural tendency to be engaged in those activities.

At these early stages of their lives, we would not expect them to grasp abstract concepts like math and science. However, it is important for them to build the foundation for those concepts through play and early experience. For example, different shapes, colors and patterns can be introduced for them to play the game of matching and building different sizes of blocks with a view to developing the notions of order, size and quantity. Similarly, a variety of objects can be used to build models taking into account their number of corners, order, space and sizes. Children can also be encouraged to develop their observational skills through concentration games. Through a variety of hands on activities children can begin to develop skills and concepts in science and technology. They need to be given a plenty of opportunities to ask questions, come up with their own hypothesis and explanations about the natural events, however childish it may seem. For example, by using a simple cup, some water and different objects, we can ask them to guess if different objects would float or sink. Then we can start a group discussion about their guesses and the result of the tests. Through that we not only encourage them to think and develop scientific concepts, but also we encourage them to develop attitudes towards how to agree or disagree with their peers and adults.

## HOSPITAL PLAY



A number of different games and plays can also be incorporated into the content of the curriculum like guessing various objects by their sounds, shadows and smells. Through well-designed games children have the chance to sharpen their senses and develop their sense of positioning and direction.

In real life nothing is isolated, however seemingly things may appear that way. In fact, things are interrelated. Therefore, when we design educational games and plays we need to think about different domains and characteristics to be developed at the same time in children.

A perfect example is given As “Hospital Play” by Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment, DENI (1997). It shows us how curriculum can be holistic as depicted below:

### **3. Cross Cultural Examples**

The period from three to five years is considered as the most crucial time for children in terms of their education. There is widespread consensus and scientific evidence that participating in a preschool program stimulates cognitive development and prepares children to perform well in later school life. In light of cross cultural research studies conducted in Europe, it was observed that children who attended child care programs tended to have higher levels of language skill development and more highly developed play and activity patterns compared to their peer children in family child care homes. Similar to those European based studies, research findings in Japanese, Singapore, South Korean, and Mt. Druiit studies focused on the impacts that participation in preschool programs had on school success confirmed that attending preschool yields benefits vis-à-vis cognitive and social skills. It is also worth emphasizing that the quality of care in family child care homes was more variable than center care (Goelman and Pence, 1987).

In another research conducted in Columbia, it was observed that children who received nutritional supplements without participating in the preschool activities made statistically significant gains in height and weight, but their cognitive abilities did not improve until they entered the preschool (Boocock, 1995).

In Turkey, it was noted that less than 2% of children under 6 attended preschool education despite government’s objective of enrolling 10% of the nation’s children (Gurkan, 1992). Also in Turkey in the late 1980s, a research was designed to demonstrate the effects on children and parents of two interventions: Firstly an adaptation of “Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters” called HIPPY. In this intervention, a home enrichment program was applied where mothers were trained to work with their preschool-aged children on educational activities. In the second intervention, children participated in either educational or custodial care programs. The longitudinal study including 251 low-income families with children 3 to 5 years old who received different combinations of treatments, and data about the children’s cognitive development, social development, and school achievement were gathered 4, 7, and 10 years later. On the whole, the findings revealed that children who attended the educational child care programs performed significantly better than children in custodial child care and home care on almost all measures of cognitive development. In addition to that children whose mothers received the above mentioned HIPPY training, outperformed the children in the control group on cognitive development and school achievement. To sum up the above longitudinal study, the group which was exposed to both educational child care and home instruction by mothers had the highest scores. Moreover, the maternal teaching program was also found to be beneficial for children who did not have access to a quality preschool education (Kagiticbasi, 1991).

The common conclusion in light of the above studies is that attendance at preschool programs is associated with cognitive gains and improved school achievement. One can safely state on the basis of research evidence from a number of countries that experience in early childhood programs provide a number of benefits to children and their families. Significant benefits however, have been observed in countries where a national policy of providing preschool services to all children are in place. Researchers in other countries have also found that disadvantaged groups seemed to benefit more from early childhood programs than those from more advantaged backgrounds. This is also useful in terms of closing the gaps in achievement level of children coming from different socio economic status.

The economic recession in many countries puts pressure on mothers to work and requires them to participate in the labor force with an increasing rate.

It can also safely be stated that in many developed countries the family size decreases and extended-family support seems to be disappearing. These conditions seem to necessitate a growing demand for preschool education. The overall availability and quality of preschool education seem to be higher in rich industrialized nations than in poor developing countries. For instance, almost 100% of French and Belgian children are enrolled in an educational preschool by age three. However, this ratio is about 28% in Spain and Portugal. In many countries access to preschool education services and facilities is much greater in urban areas than in rural ones. Also government involvement in the provision of preschool services varies from one country to another in terms of full funding. In some countries private schools seem to be preferred by parents who can afford the cost (Boocock, 1995).

#### **4. Swedish Approach to Education**

Local governments in Sweden provide well supported and subsidized child care through centers and family child care to almost 47% of children from birth up to the age of seven. A research study was conducted with a sample of 128 Swedish children born in 1975 from age 3 to age 13 where the mothers reported that their children had child care experiences during infancy. The results showed distinct advantages to children of participating in early non-parental child care in terms of verbal skills, being more persistent and independent, less anxious, and more confident than children cared for at home or children placed in child care at a later age. It was concluded that early entrance into day-care is believed to predict a creative, socially confident, popular among peers, open, and independent adolescent (Andersson, 1992). In addition to the above, two other studies conducted in Sweden reached similar findings (Broberg and et al, 1989), (Cochran and Gunnarsson, 1985).

##### **4.1 Some Facts and Figures**

- Generally schooling is free in Sweden, except for preschools and higher education (which are partly funded by the government).
- Education, at 42 percent, is the largest single item in municipal budgets.
- About 70 percent of education, and of municipal operations as a whole, is financed by municipal taxes. Other funding includes fees, rents and state grants.
- Sweden invests a total of 6.3 percent of GDP on education while the OECD average is 5.7%. Only six other OECD countries invest a greater percentage than Sweden.
- Compared with students in other countries, Swedish students have good reading skills. In several international studies, Sweden was ranked among the very best for both younger and older children (Swedish Institute, 2012).

The educational system in Sweden is based on the idea of ensuring an appropriate standard of education to all residents of the country, Swedes and non-Swedes. The Swedish Education Act and the Swedish Discrimination Act are intended to protect children and students from discrimination and degrading treatment. The principals of preschools, schools and adult education programs are responsible for enforcing prohibitions against discrimination and degrading behavior, and for promoting equal treatment. The Swedish Education Act states that all children and young people are to have equal access to education, regardless of gender, where they live or social or economic factors. Attendance at school is compulsory for all children through year 9. Today almost all children also attend non-compulsory kindergarten at the age of six. In practice, this means ten years of education in all. It appears that in Sweden preschool is regarded by most parents as a natural part of their child's upbringing. Statistically speaking about 80 percent of one- to five-year-olds attends preschool. It has to be stressed that in the Swedish preschool system the focus is on play rather than setting goals and assessing the progress of children like in the U.S and the U.K. What really emphasized in Swedish preschool curriculum are; playing together, tolerance, self-confidence, process skills, verbal and nonverbal presentation skills without being afraid of making mistakes, being independent as well as respecting others.

Outdoor activities take the priority even in freezing weather conditions. Let's not overlook the fact that midday nap outside and healthy diet being the integral part of Swedish preschool program. The cost is subsidized by the government according to the family revenue to make it affordable for everyone. The policy states that parents should only have to spend one to three percent of the family's income on childcare, depending on how many children they have. Swedish nurseries are financed partly by central government grants, partly by tax revenue and partly by parental fees.



One of the main characteristics emphasized in Swedish preschool curriculum is gender equality. Therefore, the main idea behind this approach is to free children from the expectations, stereotypes and demands that society has traditionally placed on girls and boys (Hasbar, 2010).

#### **4.2 Recent changes in the Swedish school system**

- **New education act**

The Swedish Education Act from 2011 includes basic principles and provisions for compulsory and further education, preschool, kindergarten, out-of school care and adult education. The following are especially emphasized; greater knowledge, freedom of choice, and student safety and security.

- **New curricula**

The new curricula covers compulsory schools for all students, Sami schools, special schools and high schools came into force July 1, 2011. New goals are added together with guidelines and syllabuses. As oppose to previous general goals, the new preschool curriculum includes clearer goals for children's linguistic and communicative development and for science and technology. Mandatory national subject tests are held in years 3, 6 and 9 of compulsory school to assess student progress. There are also new qualification requirements for areas including high-school studies.

- **New grading system**

The old Swedish system of Pass (G), Pass with Distinction (VG), Pass with Special Distinction (MVG) and Did Not Pass (IG) has been replaced by a new grading scale with six grades from A to F. A to E are passing grades, with F as a failing grade.

- **Introduction of teacher certification**

Beginning December 1, 2013, professional certification will be necessary for school and preschool/kindergarten teachers on permanent contracts.

Researchers believe that the impressive findings and observations like the ones mentioned above, can partially be attributed to the fact that Sweden has a national policy of providing public child care that is well funded and supported by well-established rules and regulations with regard to staffing and their training, group size, daily routines, and the learning environment.

#### **5. Conclusions & Recommendations**

As mentioned in the previous sections of this article, human brain needs stimuli to make new connections and create new neuron-networks on a constant basis. Early experience is the prime time to establish the foundation for future learning and intellectual growth. It is agreed by the scientists that early intervention affects the development of the brain and lays the basis for cognitive, emotional and also moral development.

Research findings from the early intervention studies also reveal that well-designed programs with enriched learning experiences, together with parent support, leads to improved social behaviors and enhanced cognitive and linguistic performances for disadvantaged children. These improved outcomes and performances have direct positive influence on the adjustment process as well as school achievement of children (Reynolds, Temple, Robertson, & Mann, 2001; Meisels & Shonkoff, 2000). One of the most prominent and frequently cited research studies on the effect of quality in early childhood care and education settings would be the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) *Study of Early Child Care*. As part of this research 1364 American children from birth have been monitored (Brooks-Gunn, Han & Waldfogel, 2002).

Research findings show strong associations between higher quality child care programs and higher scores on measures of cognitive growth, social development and school readiness (Brooks-Gunn, Han & Waldfogel, 2002; NICHD, 2000). Early language competence was also related to the quality of language stimulation in a child's second year (NICHD, 2002a, 2002b) and behavior problems at age 3 were correlated with below-average quality care (Brooks-Gunn, 2003). In Sweden, preschool is open to children from one to five years of age. Municipalities have an obligation to provide the necessary facilities to all children whose parents work or study.

It is estimated that about eight out of ten children from one to five years of age spend part of their weekdays in preschool settings. The Swedish tradition of preschool emphasizes the importance of play in a child's development and learning. The interests and needs of children are key components of their education in the preschool curriculum. Gender sensitivity is also highlighted in the Swedish education for children to have the same opportunities in life, regardless of gender.

It is hoped that this article inspires curriculum developers in their efforts to plan, implement and evaluate preschool programs with the emphasis on the real needs of children. As successfully designed and implemented by Swedish policy makers, curriculum developers and practitioners, we, educators, should focus on creating an effective learning environment where an ample of opportunities exist for preschool children to improve their cognitive, affective, social and psychomotor characteristics so that they become ready for their future school life.

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