

CHILDREN'S TRANSITIONS TO SCHOOL IN A CHANGING EDUCATIONAL LANDSCAPE: BORDERS, IDENTITIES AND (DIS-)CONTINUITIES

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Abstract

This article reports findings from research on children's perspectives of the transitions from preschool to compulsory school via the preschool class. In this article transitions as possible threats, continuity and 'smooth transition' and are discussed. As in many countries around the world, there are indications that preschool and school in Sweden are moving closer together in terms of assignments and content - movements that are likely to affect even the youngest children. The results highlight the complexity of transitions and its implications for educational practice, but also shed light on the organizational conditions which children have to cope with in transitions.

Keywords: Transition, continuity, preschool class, preschool, school, identities, borders

Introduction

This research project (also reported in Ackesjö, 2014) began with an interest in children's perspectives of transitions between different school forms early in the educational system. Their entries and exits to and from different contexts require that children reorient themselves. In Sweden, children make the transition from preschool to compulsory school via the preschool class. The preschool class is a voluntary school form for six-year-old children. This study focuses on children's transitions to and from the preschool class. Studying these transitions required broadening my understanding of the contexts of preschool, the preschool class and compulsory school. Children's narratives have therefore been linked to prevailing educational conditions; children's expressions about their transitions are related to the contexts of preschool, the preschool class and compulsory school.

While the main focus of the research is directed towards transitions to and from the preschool class, a subsidiary aim has been to develop knowledge about the role of the preschool class between preschool and school. On one hand, the preschool class is considered an important arena that could ease children's transition to school. On the other hand, increasing demands within the educational system have the potential to jeopardize this transition role. As in many countries around the world, there are indications that preschool and school are moving closer together in terms of aims and content. In a comparative study of quality and content in the Nordic preschools, Vallberg-Roth (2013) argued that the revised Swedish policy documents for preschool tend to focus mostly on teaching and learning, while wellbeing, security and care have become less prominent. Even Broström (2012) found that preschools have tended to narrow their activities to emphasize school preparation with a focus on teaching in school-related areas.

How do these processes affect the preschool class and its position in the educational system? Policy emphases have been directed towards play-based activities in the preschool class (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2011), rather than specific lessons and subject teaching (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2012). This places the preschool class in a borderland (Ackesjö, 2010) – an arena in between two tradition-bound institutions. Recent movements that see preschool and school becoming more alike will affect the youngest children, especially in their transitions between these school forms. Research has shown that the way transition between school forms is managed has important implications for children's

future school performance. The way children make the transition to school not only affects their initial engagement with the school, but also their later learning (Fabian, 2002; Bulkley & Fabian, 2006; White & Sharp, 2007). If preschool and compulsory school are becoming more alike, it is important to further discuss the form, content and function of the preschool class.

In this research project, three common assumptions are problematised. *The first assumption is that transitions between school forms often are presented as potential threats to children.* As an example, Ecclestone (2009) claims that transitions are critical periods that must be handled carefully. According to this argument, good transitions are 'smooth', largely because of the continuity that has been constructed between the school forms (Margetts, 2002; Fabian, 2002; 2007). In this research, transitions are examined from children's perspectives. The children are considered active in the different contexts as well as in transitions between them; they bring their experience from previous arenas and translate them into new ones. By listening to their narratives, it is possible to generate understandings of what transition means for them, which could complement and/or challenge previous notions of transitions found in policy, research or in teachers' stories. One endeavor has been to modify or nuance the picture of transitions as threats.

The current research project has also set out to explore how children express continuity as they make transitions between the different school forms. However, there are few national studies that define continuity and problematize how continuity between preschool, the preschool class and compulsory school can be constructed. *The second assumption I want to problematize is that continuity often is considered as something undeniably positive and always desirable* (Niesel & Griebel, 2007; Margetts, 2002; Fabian, 2002; 2007). The aim is to gain knowledge about when continuity is important for children and, conversely, when discontinuity may be desirable. In addition, this research provides opportunities to explore the concept of constructing 'smooth transitions'. To date, there is no national research that nuances, problematizes, or gives different perspectives on what constitutes a smooth transition and how it could be constructed as children move between different school forms in the Swedish educational system. Exploring the concept of smooth transition is therefore also of importance in this research.

In addition, there is an assumption that the Swedish preschool class is an arena for smooth transitions where traditions from preschool and school meet, and where cultures from both worlds are converging. This needs to be problematized. The preschool class is an arena that is expected to ease children's entry into school (National Agency for School Improvement, 2006; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2006; 2012). However, the results from earlier research (Ackesjö, 2010) have raised the need to consider how children perceive the trek from preschool to school through preschool class. In policy (National Agency for School Improvement, 2006) the preschool class has been likened to a bridge that leads children from preschool to school, and where the cultures of the surrounding school forms should provide continuity for the children. However, research (Ackesjö, 2010; Sandberg, 2012) has indicated that this is not necessarily the case and the preschool class also can be described as an isolated island without any contact with any other school forms; an arena where discontinuity in children's learning is constructed and where the children are placed in the 'waiting room' for compulsory education (see Ackesjö, 2013b).

Theoretical framework

The common theoretical basis for this research derives from a socio-cultural perspective on transitions (see also Rogoff, 2003) where transitions are considered as social processes which are constructed and reconstructed jointly with others. To be able to interpret and understand

children's experiences of transitions between the school forms, and to be able to catch sight of their identity constructions in the transitions, different theoretical starting points that build upon socio-cultural perspectives, have been used. Border theory is used for understanding how children mark and argue for borders between different arenas and/or communities, but also to understand how borders are made visible between different the school forms. In addition, theories of identity construction are used to describe how children in the transition process construct, de-construct and/or re-construct different identities. This will be presented in the following section.

Transitions

Drawing on socio-cultural perspectives, surroundings, relationships and context become key aspects of the transition process. The socio-cultural environment is an important factor that shapes the experiences of transition. Transition may be considered as both a process and a result of socio-cultural interactions (Schumacher & Meleis, 1994; Chick & Meleis, 1986). To understand children's transitions, the different educational contexts in which children participate, in this project the preschool, preschool class and Grade 1, have been taken into account. Understanding how children express separation from the old arena and entry into the new requires understandings of the different social and educational contexts.

Bridges (1986, 2013) argues that the transitions are processes of change, incorporating three phases; an initial stage characterized by emancipation; a neutral phase characterized by disorientation; and finally a phase of a new beginning that is characterized by finding new meaning and experiencing new control. However, these are not three clearly separated phases. An individual is often in more than one phase, even if one of them is predominant. Before the individual can enter the 'new' arena and begin to reorient themselves, they must go through the neutral phase. The neutral phase can be alarming; '...it is a nowhere between two somewheres...' (Bridges 2013, p.40), but at the same time a phase of possibilities. Conceptually, this neutral phase is at the core of transition. In the neutral phase the individual is placed in between what was, and what is to come. Experiences of confusion are to be expected.

Bridges is not the only theorist to delineate phases of transition. In his framework of Rites of Passage, van Gennep (1960; 1977) also described several phases of transition. This theoretical framework has been used for analysis in the first article in order to understand the various 'rites' or phases children become a part of during the time they finish their pre-school period. Based on this framework, transitions involve constantly being separated and reunited – but in a new way. van Gennep's (1960; 1977) main point is that different passages or transitions follow us throughout life, and that these are marked as socio-cultural rituals or actions.

Border theories

Wenger (1998) described borders as important distinctions between different communities of practice. The borders are constructed by the members through their shared engagement in the communities, which also makes the borders flexible and mobile. This way of considering borders implies that they are argued and constructed socially in a community. When the different school forms are regarded as communities, the implication is that borders between school forms are both negotiated and maintained by individuals. From this perspective, the borders are constituted by processes and/or discourses that are constructed by stories of shared experiences that bind individuals together (Paasi, 2005). Through such common stories, children can understand and make sense of the social world and thus construct social

identities in order to define who they are. Common stories and experiences of the past, present and future can be linked together to create continuity (Paasi, 1998).

Borders can also be understood as fixed and static. A clear example of this is that the different school forms are based on different curriculum and policy documents, which create institutional borders. Although borders are embedded in all of our everyday lives, they need not be conceptualized as fences, walls or borders on a map. Indeed, some invisible borders have strong impacts, providing guidance about how we should live and work (Newman, 2006b). Considering borders as both fixed and static means that individuals can be positioned simultaneously as included (in 'their' community) and excluded (from the community on the other side of the border). Newman (2006a) argues that borders are often detected when they are violated or crossed, since borders reflect differences experienced by those who belong, and those who do not belong, to the group inside or outside the border.

In the transition processes, children mark and construct borders through speech and action. These border markings (between different communities and between different school forms) also become part of children's identity constructions (Newman & Paasi, 1998) which will be discussed in the following section.

Identity constructions

One way to understand how identities are constructed is to study how borders are marked. A theoretical starting point for the research project has been that borders are involved in the construction of identities in the same way that identities are involved in the construction of borders. Establishing something, for example to give different school forms a definition, meaning and identity, involves establishing borders to other school forms. Identities are an aspect of the present and are constructed in relation to diversity – that is, we construct ourselves in relation to what we are not (Newman & Paasi, 1998). Thus, the border constructions and identity constructions can be linked together theoretically and conceptually.

Identities are under constant construction and change in a social community; they do not suddenly emerge as individuals enter a new arena (Rogoff 1996; 2003). Instead, identities are constructed and reconstructed over a longer period of interaction with other individuals, environments and circumstances. This means that children's identity (re-)constructions during transitions occur over the entire transition process.

From this, it is assumed that children negotiate and/or re-construct identities while crossing borders during transition, and that during this negotiation and reconstruction, children relate to the contexts in which they are currently located. Children's meaning making and their interpretations of the context becomes a key factor in the processes of identity construction (Schumacher & Meleis, 1994). This means that the children both shape transitions, and are shaped by the transitions. Children's identity constructions in this border work are embedded in the practices they experience in their current location. The identity construction process is challenged during transitions between contexts. This has also been an important starting point in the analysis of the empirical data.

Theoretical conclusions

Transitions involve crossing borders. When children are making meaning of one school form, they also mark borders and mark differences from other school forms outside the borders. Constructions of identities and constructions of borders thus seem to be intertwined, as children relate themselves to the arena in which they currently exist, and to other actors across the border. The common epistemological thread between these theories is that of social

construction. A concept in focus is membership; during transitions children end their membership in one community and cross a border into another community, where they also reconstruct their identities. By bringing together socio-cultural, border-crossing and identity theories, a theoretical foundation has been constructed and used across the research project.

Aim and research questions

Research suggests a tension around transitions in the early years: while the borders between school forms have become highlighted more clearly, there are also ambitions that the transitions between them should be 'soft' – that is, not posing potential threats as children move into and out of the different school forms. Children's transitions early in the Swedish school system are particularly interesting when considered in relation to the moving educational landscape, where the positions of different school forms seem to be changing, as preschool and school tend to move closer together in terms of content and form, and where the positioning of the preschool class as a borderland (Ackesjö, 2010) seems to have received blurred outlines.

The overall purpose of the research is to gain knowledge of how the transitions to and from the preschool class can be described and understood from children's perspectives. The following primary research question has been formulated to meet this objective:

How can continuity/discontinuity in transitions be described and understood from children's perspectives, and what forms of continuity/discontinuity are indicated in children's narratives in terms of identity (re)constructions and border markings?

In my research, transitions to and from the preschool class are the subjects of study, as reflected in the following secondary research question:

How can the preschool class be described and understood from children's perspectives, in terms of the borders between school forms as marked by children?

Methodological framework

The theoretical framing of this research positions children's transitions as processes that occur over a long time period (Chick & Meleis, 1986). This process is not linear; it should rather be regarded as a series of spiral interactions (Ackesjö, 2013a). This implies that the transition's complexity needs to be understood in several ways.

In the current project, the aim was to use several different approaches to describe the transition process from the 'notion' of the first critical event (Chick & Meleis, 1986). To achieve this, the study utilized an ethnographic fieldwork over a period of 18 months, where I participated in the children's everyday lives in three different school forms (preschool, preschool class and compulsory school), and in the transitions between these. In preschool, 21 children were included in the study; in the preschool class 15 children were included; and in first year in school 21 children were included. Since children's groups were mixed and divided in the transitions between all school forms, only four of those children made both transitions and participated in all three forms of school together (see also Ackesjö, 2014).

The study generated longitudinal data. The strengths of longitudinal studies are that it is possible to follow both activities and individuals over a period of time, and empirical data can be compared over time. Throughout longitudinal field work, variations in the experiences and meaning making of individual participants become visible. Over time, various pictures of the studied phenomenon are constructed, pictures that can provide new understandings. Various forms of data are constructed and can be analyzed both at the individual level and at the

organizational level. Since the data is constructed over time, variations of the subject of study can be made visible (see Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2005).

In conducting this longitudinal study, it was important to be present in children's everyday lives for an extended period of time in all the three school forms. Through this presence, children could be met in their everyday activities and their experiences and actions documented. The longitudinal approach has also resulted in the ability to switch between empiricism and theory, to develop, test and reject conclusions and allow the analyses to be reviewed and developed using new empirical data. This oscillating process between analysis and empirical design is described as the core of ethnographic research (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). This process requires both description and understanding of those observed, while developing an analytical understanding of the same phenomena.

Researching with children may require a mosaic of methods (Clark & Moss, 2001). The role as a researcher has been to try to see the possibilities in each situation, and make judgments about what approaches are relevant for the generation of data in that particular situation, with that group of children and in that particular school form. In line with ethnographic principles, an exploratory approach to the field work have been used (Robson, 2002), which implies not following a pre-planned design (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Instead, the aim was to be flexible and use different methods to approach and gain knowledge about the research area, as is characteristic of ethnographic fieldwork (a.a.). Several different methods have been used in generating data: video observations; informal every-day conversations with the children; pre-planned and structured interviews; inviting children to paint/draw; and together we have made mind maps of their experiences and expectations of the transitions. During the time in preschool, the children's visits to the preschool class were observed and documented and, after the visits were conducted, stimulated recalls were undertaken where we looked at the photos from the visits together and recorded the conversations.

Utilizing a range of different methods allowed flexibility and responsiveness to the situation. The flexibility also implied that the children could choose to participate in the study in different ways, and in different situations. In all, the empirical material consists of 1179 minutes of digital film, 2234 minutes of recorded conversations, and 1354 photos, 49 drawings, in addition to my field notes.

Findings

In this final section the assumptions that were presented initially are discussed in relation to the overall purpose of this research, namely to gain knowledge of how the transitions to and from preschool class can be described and understood from children's perspectives.

Transitions as potential threats

The first assumption was that transitions between school forms often are described as potential threats for children and, for this reason, they need to 'be smooth' and eased for children (Margetts, 2002; Fabian, 2002; 2007; Ecclestone, 2009). Through the children's stories, knowledge has been gained about how complex transitions between school forms and the opportunities and dilemmas afforded by these.

Transitions between school forms can be considered as threats for children in terms of *social discontinuity* (see Fabian, 2002; 2007). The children in this research project emphasized that the most problematic element of the transition from preschool to the preschool class was not the meeting with a new culture or a large school yard; rather, it was the separation from old friends and entry into new communities that children pointed to as the greatest threat or worry

in transition (see Ackesjö & Persson, 2014). Transitions require children to end old relationships; entry into new communities requires the construction of new relationships. These changes contribute to characterizations of transitions as critical, or potential threats. The results demonstrate the need to focus not only children's adjustment into the new arena, but also their separation from the old arena and the old community. To give children the opportunities to separate and distance themselves from earlier communities and relationships may thus be one way to ease the transition for children.

The results have also shown that transitions between school forms may pose concerns if children are not prepared for what they will face. This research implies that children can get lost in transition; this period can be an unstable time of contra flow with synchronous exit- and entry processes floating in to each other (Ackesjö, 2013a). Teachers certain responsibility towards children in transition is helping them to gain experiences of the new arena and to create feelings of safety both in the new context and in the new group of children. In addition, children also may need help to become aware of that a transition is coming, that their time in preschool is over and that something else is following. Through well-planned preparatory activities, the children may be provided with opportunities to, at their own pace, prepare for the new school form. All transitions involve reconstructions of both identities and expectations, and through preparatory activities, children are afforded opportunities for interpretations and reinterpretations of what they will face in the next context. For this reason it is essential that teachers of all school forms cooperate prior to children's transitions, to meet children's questions and concerns, and to give both the child's separation processes and adaptation processes focus. This could minimize the experience of transitions as critical, or potential threats.

Transition is not only about adjustments to the new; it also involves the deconstruction of the old. In this research project, children's interpretations and negotiations of both the old and the new arena become visible. These interpretations and negotiations also become part of children's identity deconstructions. *To become an Ex preschooler* revolves around detachment and de-identification from preschool and became important to the children prior to the transition to preschool class. The results (Ackesjö, 2013a) show that children's identity deconstructions focused on liberation and withdrawal from preschool and had to do with their border markings, their interpretations of the preschool class and of what was awaiting them after transition. In this identity construction processes, priming events, such as visits to preschool class, must be considered as important preparations for children in transition in order to help children to set the proper expectations for the new arena.

There has been a lack of national research that nuances, problematizes and offers perspectives on what a smooth transition might be and how it may be constructed. Based on the results of this project (see Ackesjö, 2013a), *a smooth transition appears to be a spiral process* in which children have the opportunity to commute back and forth across borders between different school forms, and engage in different communities in different arenas. This spiral process is created by repeated visits to the new school form prior to every transition. By repeating visits, for example to the preschool class at the end of the spring semester in preschool, children can move back and forth over borders as in a spiral process, where they have the opportunities to construct and reconstruct expectations and experiences of the different school forms and, by this, become prepared for the new.

Continuity or discontinuity in transitions?

The second assumption was that continuity in transitions between school forms is often described and considered as something entirely positive and always desirable (Niesel &

Griebel, 2007; Margetts, 2002; Fabian, 2002; 2007). However, children's perspectives of continuity are often missing in research. When is continuity desirable for them? Conversely, when do children desire discontinuity?

From time to time, it is possible to suspect that continuity between school forms is about making the different arenas as equal as possible – in terms of curriculum goals, content and teaching methods. However, the results from this research show that discontinuities offer children opportunities and challenges in transitions. Transitions between school forms is, according to the results, about challenges, opportunities and constraints; about changes and preservations; about security and about risk-taking; but also about making the borders visible and marking the meeting with something new. It is also about identity deconstructions and reconstructions. As children were crossing the borders between preschool, preschool class and compulsory school, and in line with their expectations on the new school form and on themselves as future children and pupils in these school forms, the constructed and reconstructed identities as *future pupils*, *Ex preschoolers*, *playful preschool class children* and *adjusted and responsible pupils*. It was indicated that children's ways of defining themselves, and their markings of borders between the school forms, were changing over time and depending on the current context (Ackesjö, 2013b).

As described previously, the *social discontinuity* in transitions seems to be most problematic from children's perspectives. For children, continuing to belong to a community, where relationships with peers are already established, seems to be the foundation for a successful transition (Ackesjö & Persson, 2014). In contrast, children seem to both expect and desire a *physical discontinuity* (see Fabian, 2002; 2007) in the transition between preschool and the preschool class. Getting to meet the school environment after a number of years in a preschool environment was described as positive and inspiring by the children in the project. The results have also shown that, despite the physical discontinuity, which derives from the preschool and preschool classes being located at sites geographically separated from each other, there is a *cultural continuity* (see Petriwskyj, Thorpe & Tayler, 2005) between the pedagogical physical settings in the preschool and the preschool class. The environments in the preschool and preschool class were quite similar, suggesting that children have opportunities to recognize the activities in the preschool class, based on their experiences from preschool, even if the educational setting of the preschool class also was influenced by the school culture. However, this continuity was not described as entirely positive by the children as they expected the preschool class to be more like school as they seemed eager to 'leave preschool behind' after the transition to preschool class.

The results also show that children desire *educational continuity*, namely that the teaching is based on their experiences from previous school forms, while at the same time, they also sought opportunities for further development and deepening of already developed skills (Ackesjö, 2013b). In the results, it appears to be difficult to construct this continuity in preschool class as the education landscape is changing and preschool and school is moving closer to each other in terms of content and focus. Teachers need to take joint responsibility for both the content of education but also for the transitions children make between the three school forms. Lack of communication between teachers can contribute to a lack of educational continuity.

The results show that transitions between school forms are not 'seamless'. On the contrary, there are many contrasts and challenges for children to deal with. This is also something children expect; they expect that the different school forms will be different in both content and form (Ackesjö, 2013b). From their perspectives, differences and discontinuities contribute to visible and marked borders between school forms. Just as in a patchwork quilt,

the different school forms are not identical and, according to the children in this study, nor should they be.

The preschool class as an arena for smooth transitions

The third assumption was that the preschool class, through its 'mixed' character, is expected to give children a 'smooth transition' between preschool and compulsory education. One consequence is that the transition from preschool to the preschool class is given more focus and is prepared more carefully than the transition from the preschool class to Grade 1. This can be explained by the perceived role of the preschool class as a preparatory transition zone. Through its physical placement in the school environment the children have daily opportunities to meet and be challenged by the culture of the school. This familiarity can make the transition from the preschool class to Grade 1 less threatening than the transition from preschool to the preschool class. The co-location of the preschool class and school also contribute to the conceptualization of the entire preschool class year as a spiral transition process.

As mentioned previously, the results of this project demonstrate that the preschool class can offer children cultural continuity whereby the pedagogical physical setting in the preschool and the preschool class is fairly similar. In the preschool class, a purposeful mix of cultures can be created. The cultural continuity allows children in the preschool class to recognize themselves in activities, conditions and settings while they also meet the conditions, environments and cultures of school.

One of the challenges for children in the transition to the preschool class is to interpret this arena. Initially, the children encounter difficulties with how to interpret the preschool class – being unsure about whether it is school or not. Previous research (Karlsson et.al, 2006; Simeonsdotter Svensson, 2009) has shown that the preschool class has become 'schoolified'; that is more like school than preschool, despite its ambitions to bridge over these two school forms. The children in this research gave no hints that can be related to their perception of the preschool class as 'schoolified'. Rather, the results show that the children in the preschool class experienced activities that were reproduced from preschool. Recognizing the changing educational landscape in Sweden, there is some risk that the preschool may become an arena for preparation for school and that the preschool class may come to be constructed as a 'waiting room' for the children, where they redo and reproduce preschool (Ackesjö, 2013b). This suggests that educational continuity is required between the three different school forms.

Children's difficulties in interpreting the preschool class could be explained by the fact that children in the Swedish school system start school twice; both when they start the preschool class and also when they start in grade 1. This phenomenon of 'double school start' is also discussed by Sandberg (2012), who argues that the preschool class facilitates and dampens the start of school for children. Based on the results from this research, children put great effort and energy into both deconstructing old and constructing new identities before and after each transition, regardless of the school form. Children need to restart their transition processes at each transition to a new school form and, in this process, the preschool class does not seem to stand out as a school form that is more facilitating or dampening than any other.

The preschool class could also be regarded as an initiation into school (van Genneep, 1960; 1977) children are afforded opportunities to, as in a spiral process, adapt to the new conditions and be initiated into the school environment and routines throughout the entire school year. If we choose to consider the preschool class in such a way, there is the basis for alleging that this school form is a very important part of children's transition from preschool to school. The preschool class becomes a place where children, without any requirement of

performance, may prepare for meetings with differences, contrasts and variations both in terms of activities, teaching content, relationships and environments. How the academic year in the preschool class, as well as the transitions to and from the preschool class, is handled could therefore impact children's further education.

Concluding remarks and implications for practice and further research

As in many countries around the world, there are indications that preschool and school are moving closer together in terms of assignments and content - movements that are likely to affect even the youngest children. In Sweden, both the preschool class and children's school start age has once more become subject of political discussions and possible new considerations in Sweden (see SOU 2010:67; Government's Memorandum 20140108). The transition to school is in many ways according to Lago (2014) about making pupils of children, which implies that children must orient themselves in what a pupil is and what school is all about. One interesting question to consider is what educational ideals that should prevail in the preschool class. What is it that children need to be adapted to and prepared for? As the educational landscape changes, there is a risk that the terrain becomes impassable for children. Changes in the different school forms tend to go in line with the development of an audit society where formalized education, increased assessment and earlier grades is emphasized more often than how to keep children's interest, desire and curiosity to learn (Ackesjö, 2014). It may be important to further consider how these educational changes affect the children early in the educational system.

The results have also shown that transitions between school forms do not only involve crossing institutional borders. Children also have to cross borders between communities and various relational contexts. Transition processes are therefore not only about adapting to the new - the separation from the old arena and past relationships also comes into focus from children's perspectives. These results serve to highlight the complexity of transitions and its implications for educational practice, but also shed light on the organizational conditions which children have to cope with in transitions (Ackesjö, 2014). Further considerations ought to be given to children's separation processes and its implications for practice.

Based on the results it is possible to discuss the concept of continuity in relation to transitions. Through transitions, differences between school types becomes in focus. The question is how easy it is to construct continuity in transitions between school forms. Continuity can be described as the creation of consistency or coherence. However, consistency and transition are concepts that, based on results of this research, in themselves may seem contradictory (Ackesjö, 2014). The results show that transitions are processes characterized by *discontinuities* in for example environments and relationships, which is something children have to cope with. Transitions between school forms are about change, and are rooted in a society with an educational system where cultural frameworks represent the conditions under which transitions can occur.

One conclusion of this research project is that if we want to examine transitions between school forms it is not sufficient to turn to the policy level, curricula or even teachers' aims or aspirations. Children's perspectives need to be heard in order to understand transitions. In this study, children's narratives have generated new knowledge about how transitions between school forms can be facilitated for them, identified opportunities transitions can offer, and also highlighted the ways in which transitions can be difficult for children to interpret. This study has also put forward children's perspectives on how discontinuity between school forms actually can be desirable in order to mark borders between school forms.

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