

THE SUCCESS OF IMMIGRANT CHILDREN AT SCHOOL: EFFECTS OF EARLY CHILD CARE AS TRANSITIONAL SPACE

This study is part of the Swiss National Research Program "Migration and Intercultural Relationships" (NRP 39) and deals with the educational situation of immigrant children and the question of how to prevent school problems. It is based on the assumption that school success of immigrant children is not only associated with the sociocultural preconditions of the family and/or teaching-related preconditions of the school but is essentially influenced by the situation these children experience at preschool age, or by the quality of care they receive.

The study's central issue is how the child manages the transition from his or her family to school. It is to be assumed that various ways of managing such transitions can be identified, with consideration to the individual family structure and culture, the effected mode of care, and the ways the child is introduced into kindergarten and school. So the question is: Do complementary care facilities for preschool children, e. g. day nurseries, day care centers, child minders or playgroups, contribute to enhancing future educational opportunities for immigrant children? In other words: If a child attends such facilities, does this have favorable consequences for his or her later school success? And if this is really true, what are these favorable consequences

RESEARCH METHODS AND POPULATION

First, a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods provides for an inventory of all complementary child care facilities and the identification of all participating children aged 4 and 6 from different ethnic backgrounds (Swiss, Albanian, Italian, Turkish, Portuguese) in the three cities of Winterthur, Neuchâtel und Locarno (population: N = 1781; analyzable record at time 1: N = 876). Second, a subsample of families who have been selected by means of case study and the contrasting of cases, is examined as to their problem-solving strategies for their children's transition to kindergarten and school and as to the children's reception there (N = 15). Finally, social integration and actual school success are reviewed using the assessment made by the individual educators and the teacher during the first year in class (analyzable record one year later, at time 2: N = 642).

MAJOR RESULTS

Participation in child care: Four of five children of our population under study (children aged 4 and 6) receive regular care in the context of public facilities. By contrast, almost every fourth immigrant child doesn't receive care from other people, whether at a private or institutional level. The situation is even more conspicuous in the cohort of the younger children (aged 4): While more than 70 % of Swiss children use complementary child care facilities in some form or

other and thus get to know life outside their own families, this applies to little less than 50 % of the immigrant children. And the extent of non-institutional child care (e. g. with relatives or neighbors) is clearly lower in immigrant families than in Swiss families.

Consequences of child care for school success: Children who, from third year on, have received care and support not only in their families but also in day nurseries, playgroups, child-minding families, or in kindergartens, get better assessments of their cognitive, linguistic, and social abilities from their teachers than children who grow up solely within their immediate family circles. In particular, immigrant children who receive complementary care at preschool age manage the transition to school significantly better than children who lack this mediating link and have to make their way in a world "unfamiliar" to them.

In Switzerland, there are diverse transitory spaces that function as a link for disconnectedly structured worlds of preschool children and are provided in many forms. Despite their rich diversity, they are still few and far between, little known and hardly coordinated – with the exception of those in the canton of Ticino (italian part of Switzerland). It is, therefore, important to accelerate the promotion of high-quality child care facilities. In time this could prevent later learning difficulties and behavioral problems at school.

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CONFERENCES*

XXIV World Congress of OMEP will be held in Melbourne, Australia from July 21-24, 2004. The theme of the conference is "One World: Many Childhoods".

More information about the conference is available at the following website
<http://www.omepaustralia.com.au>

For more information please send e-mail to omep@meetingplanners.com.au
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