

Perspectives of Finnish early education

Pentti Hakkarainen

Milda Bredikyte

University of Oulu

Present situation

- Day care system from 0 to 5 years; every family has a subjective right for day care, but parents have to pay according to incomes
- Kindergarten class (“bridge” from preschool to elementary school) for 6 years olds prepares children for school (may be 0 grade at school or K-class in day care centers); free for all
- Day care team of 1 teacher, 1 social educator, 1 nurse; 12 – 24 children; ideal: at least the teacher has university level exam BA

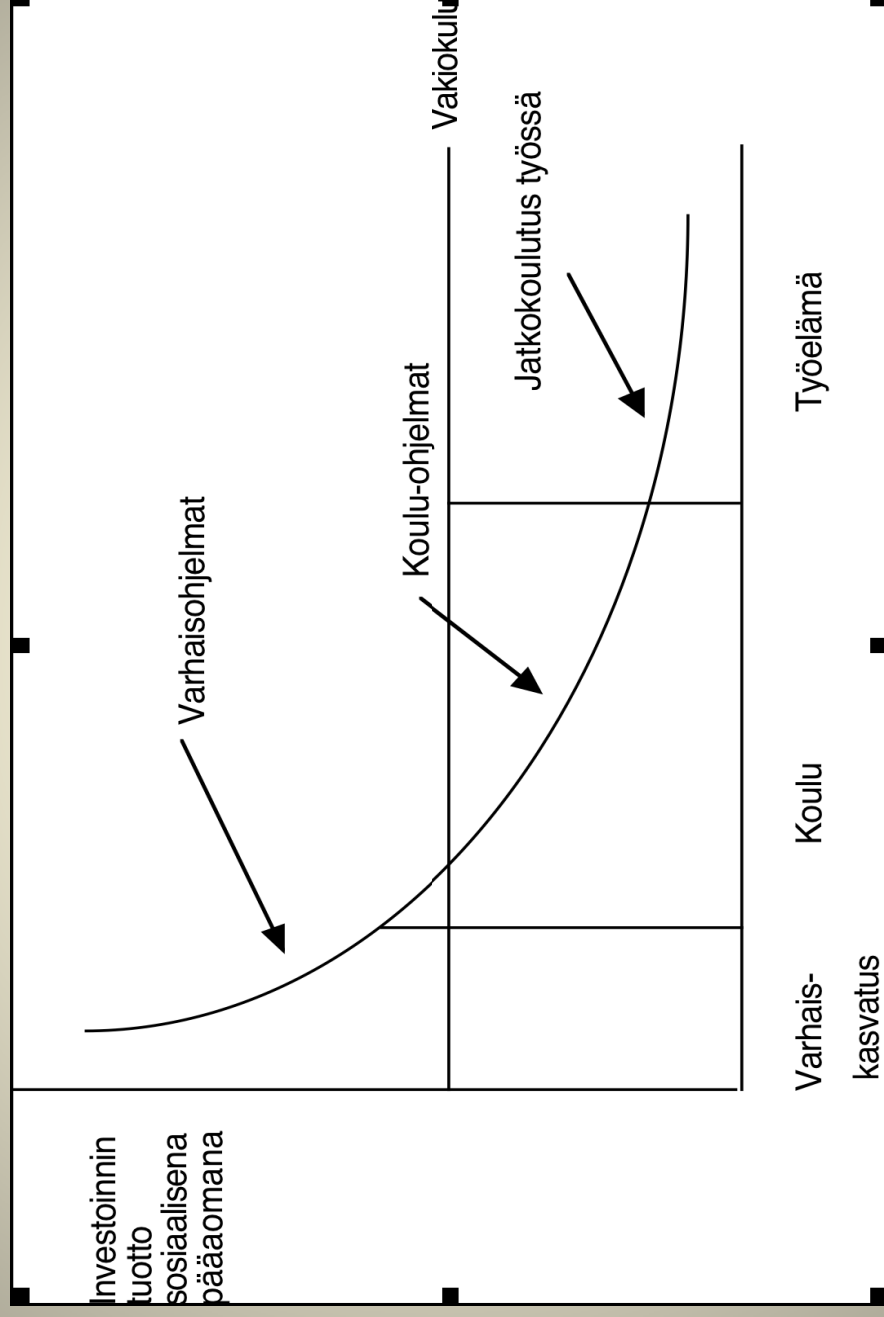
Top quality system

- Parental leave for both parents
- Municipal day care services (every family has a subjective right) – income based charge
- Free education (kindergarten class) for 6 year-olds
- After school clubs K - 2
- Child guidance and family counseling
- Child welfare – preventive and specific services (municipal maternity and child health clinics, family counseling clinics, family centers)

Biggest problems

- Care orientation: wellbeing as goal; no time for education or child development
- Strong social work in early intervention
- Funding is decided on city level (permanent deficit)
- Low participation: financial support to mother. Participation rate for children from 1-6 years-old is 62,7% but 96,3 % of 6 year-olds participate in kindergarten class.
- Law of day care, not education, and not development
- Continuity; development of school readiness

Profit from investment (Heckman)



How play development is supported?

- Play is important developmental factor, but “instinctive, free activity” , which is controlled by adults
- Great differences between units: play-oriented centers - “normal” centers (time for play in short periods even less than one hour / day)
- Time is needed for “real learning” by teaching children because play is not serious learning
- What kind of learning leads to development?

The problem of development in play

- Three cultural approaches:
 - (1) play is not supported,
 - (2) play is accepted as children's activity,
 - (3) play is actively supported by adults

We understand children's play as

- The main age-appropriate form of learning & development:
 - The primary form of a child's thinking - a movement from 'thinking' using body movements and actions (gesture language) to thinking in words (concepts)
 - *Nonverbal form of narration*: a child uses play as a medium to create narratives about himself and the world.

Developed narrative role-play

- A substantial feature of mature narrative role-play is the ability of the players to develop shared ideas and to construct a plot (storyline) together.
- Criteria of mature narrative role-play:
 - Social, co-constructed (2 and more participants)
 - Imaginative (based on productive imagination)
 - Creative (not stereotypical)
 - Lasting in time (may last several months and develops over time)
 - Challenging (demands action at the highest level of play skills)
 - Has narrative structure

Play & development

- In the cultural-historical tradition (Vygotsky, El'konin), play is considered to be a source of development of general learning potential and the following abilities:
 - Motivation;
 - Comprehension of the other person's perspective;
 - Imagination;
 - Volition and self-regulation (El'konin, 1978).

Problems of play development

- According to some researchers (Mikhailenko & Korotkova, 2001, Bodrova & Leong, 2007), an increasing number of children do not develop mature forms of play before school age.
- Possible solution: adult intervention
- Our project trains teacher education students how to intervene effectively in children's play in order to support the development of more mature forms of play.

Creative drama interventions

- Creative drama methods are used for interventions (Lindqvist, 1995; Paley, 1999 Bredikyte, 2001): adults and children in roles 'act out' different adventures of the characters.
- The main goal is to involve children to the process of active exploration, experiencing (perezhivanie) and reflection & to support the development of more mature forms of play.
- Joint creativity (child-adult) and improvisation is the central focus.

Searching for the stolen treasure



Steps of the construction of interventions

- **I step:** Introduction of a new story through storytelling, puppet presentation or dramatization
- **II step:** Co-construction of a playworld ('in-role' participation of students)
- **III step:** Reflection on joint experiences through painting/drawing, oral storytelling supported with puppets and etc.

Results: changes in the children's collective play

- transition from daily themes to imaginary plots;
- increase of combinatory plots of several stories;
- increase of persistent long-term play themes;
- increase of young children's active participation;
- broader repertoire of cultural tools in play;
- more collective play activities;
- increase of general creativity;
- increase of cognitive abilities & skills.

Results: individual trajectories

- Children's participatory trajectory gradually changed from *resistance, uncertainty and lack of self-confidence* through *raising interest, careful observation and active participation to leadership and organization of the activity*.
- Children are developing their personal "narrative voice" and find the best suitable form to express their thinking.

Conclusions

- Analysis of collaborative interactions revealed that adult participation in joint activities (drama, play, painting) creates the space supportive for the development of all participants, **both children and adults.**
- Participation in joint play moves participants into collaborative co-construction of shared activity system (play + narrative) and prepares the next developmental step (self-development) in children + professional & personality development in adults.