

European Journal of Special Needs Education



ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rejs20

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To cite this article: Jenny Wilder & Anne Lillvist (2022) Teachers' and parents' meaning making of children's learning in transition from preschool to school for children with intellectual disability, European Journal of Special Needs Education, 37:2, 340-355, DOI: 10.1080/08856257.2021.1889847

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2021.1889847

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Teachers' and parents' meaning making of children's learning in transition from preschool to school for children with intellectual disability

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to explore parents' and teachers' meaning making of children's learning in transitions from preschool to school, for 5-7-year-old children with intellectual disability (ID). Although educational transitions is a growing area of research there is limited research about educational transitions of children with ID. These children often need individual adaptations in pedagogical settings and children with ID are most dependent on supportive persons for learning. In a Swedish context, the transitions from preschool to school of eight children with ID were studied during one year. Fortyseven interviews with parents, preschool- and school teachers were performed on three occasions pre- and post-transition. The interviews were analysed using interpretative phenomenological analysis. Results showed that the master themes 'Organising for Child Wellbeing', 'Adapting Strategies for Learning', and 'Processing Time' constituted how parents and teachers perceived and responded to the children's learning. Individualisation of transitions is needed and should be built up by close and tentative adaptations that prevail over transitions. This study shows that for children with ID learning is a social process where close partners are very important for child well-being, and thus learning.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 3 September 2020 Accepted 3 February 2021

KEYWORDS

Children: intellectual disability; transition; preschool: learning: teachers

Introduction

Transitions are recognised as central to young children's experiences and well-being (Vogler, Crivello, and Woodhead 2008), and educational transitions in the early years of children is a growing field of research (Dockett and Perry 2013; Boyle, Grieshaber, and Petriwskyj 2018). Although, there is limited research about educational transitions of young children with intellectual disability (ID). Research about transitions for students with ID have mostly focused on transition from school (Lee and Burke 2020).

This study aimed to explore parents' and teachers' meaning making of children's learning in transitions from preschool to school, for 5-7-year-old children with ID. In alignment with the social cultural theory that states the importance of collaborative and social dimensions of learning (Vygotsky 1934/1986), this current study pinpoints stakeholders' perspectives on children's learning. Stakeholder collaboration is important in order to be

able to support children's well-being and learning in best possible ways, especially concerning children with special needs (Balduzzi et al. 2019; Wilder and Lillvist 2018).

When stakeholder perspectives align trusty relationships can be established. Trusty relationships seem to be challenged in transitions from preschool, for example, as a consequence of different policies regulating the access of parents in early childhood institutions (Wickett 2017). Also changes in identity of roles of parents and teachers and the discontinuities in relationships when teachers change affect the building of trusty relationships (Griebel and Niesel 2009). Nonetheless, research has shown that in transition to primary school parents of children with special needs rely on teachers' professional expertise and trust their opinions (Rothe, Urban, and Werning 2014).

In early educational transitions collaboration across settings and continuity of support are essential for positive transition experiences for children with special needs (McIntyre, Blacher, and Baker 2006). However, continuity of support across settings and individual adaptations are dependent on professional expertise and teacher competence. Teachers are implementers of inclusive practice but their conceptions of the meaning of inclusion and special educational needs can differ, due to experience, education or the discourse within the specific educational setting. For example, Ginner Hau, Selenius, and Björck Åkesson (2020) conclude that special educational support in Swedish preschools focuses on group level and preschool environment, rather than individual children. In compulsory school, the situation is quite the opposite as the support generally is targeted towards the needs of individual children (Wilder and Klang 2017).

Regardless of educational setting research show that children with ID often need individual adaptations in pedagogical settings and they are most dependent on supportive persons for learning (Foreman 2009; Schalock 2013). Individual adaptations entail special teaching strategies and teaching material (Andersson 2020), multimodal communication and the use of augmentative pictures and objects (Beukelman and Mirenda 2013). Adaptations may also include adjusted space and place i.e. in order to achieve positive child learning, tentativeness by close persons in the surrounding environment to the needs for changes in learning environments should be prevalent (Foreman 2009). Furthermore, in a qualitative study within a Swedish context, Aspelin, Östlund, and Jönsson (2020) showed that special educators considered trusty relationships with students to be fundamental to successful professional work with students with special needs. It has been determined in many ways through research that children with ID need persons in their close environment to be tentative and flexible to achieve successful learning opportunities (Dunst et al. 2001).

Theoretical framework

In concordance with social-cultural theory (Vygotsky 1934/1986), we consider children's learning to be a social process. We also align to pragmatism (Dewey 1938/1997) and consider that earlier experience lay the ground for new learning. Taking this perspective on learning in relation to children with ID highlights the special conditions that apply for these children. Furthermore, according to Dewey (1938/1997; Dewey and Bentley 1949/1991), meaning making is constructed in mutual transactional processes between one's own actions and the consequences in the environment of those actions. As such, meaning making is an ongoing process where the individual and context reacts and acts as



participants in the same situation. Following Dewey's lead, Öhman (2008) describes that meaning making is thus unresolvedly linked with the relationships that are created in actions. The meaning making can be understood by studying participants' perceptions and responses in these actions.

Swedish educational context for children with ID

The Swedish educational context for children in their early years is built up of preschool (for children 0-5 years) and preschool class (for children 6 years of age). Children start primary school the autumn the year they turn 7 years old. The preschool and preschool class setting in Sweden is inclusive; all children with or without disability attend together and children most often attend their local preschool or preschool class (Lillvist 2010; Wilder and Klang 2017). The majority of children in the age range 0–5 attend preschool, 85% in 2019 (National Agency for Education 2020a). After preschool, children transition to preschool class, and in 2019 98% of all 6-year-olds attended preschool class (National Agency for Education 2020b).

In Sweden, there is a separate curriculum called Compulsory School for Students with Intellectual Disability (CSSID) (Wilder and Klang 2017). The CSSID is provided for children with diagnosed ID who are not anticipated to be able to reach the educational goals of compulsory school, and approximately 1% of all Swedish students from 7 to 15 years attend CSSID. The CSSID can be organised in different ways, either as separate schools in a community or by separate facilities or classes integrated within a regular school. In CSSID schools or classes the staff-student ratio is high and learning environments are adapted. In the autumn of 2016 there were 591 separate CSSID schools in 259 out of the 290 Swedish municipalities (National Agency for Education 2018). Children with moderate to severe ID most often transition from preschool directly to CSSID school and do not attend preschool class (Lillvist and Wilder 2017).

Aim of the study

This study aimed to explore parents' and teachers' meaning making of children's learning in transitions from Swedish preschool to school. The research question was: How do parents and teachers perceive and respond to children's learning in the transition from preschool to school when children have intellectual disability?

Method

In the present study, the transition from preschool to school for children with ID is in focus, and the transition of eight children with ID were studied during one year. Potential parents were approached through their special education contact with Swedish disability services. The parents were given information about the research study by a professional at Swedish disability services and consent was sought for the researchers to contact the parents. Children's teachers were approached through the parents who explained the family's participation in the study, and consent was sought for the researchers to contact the teachers. In all meetings the voluntariness of the participants was stressed by the

researchers. Ethical approval for this research was granted by the Swedish Ethics Committee for Research (Dnr: 2013/512).

Participants

(Table 1) shows characteristics of participants and the eight transitions that were studied during one year. The participants consisted of 10 parents of 8 children, 7 boys and 1 girl, between five and seven years of age. Each child had ID, with a range from mild to severe. The children also had other difficulties (e.g. communication and behavioural) and or diagnosis (e.g. ADHD and Fragile X). Overall, the children had moderate to severe disabilities considering their functional profiles that were described by their parents. Participants were also 8 preschool teachers and 8 school teachers. All preschool teachers had similar backgrounds as they had preschool education for Swedish inclusive preschool practices. The school teachers had diverse educational backgrounds depending on if they worked in CSSID school or in regular primary school. Apart from teacher education the school teachers in CSSID also had further education about special needs.

For the purpose of confidentiality, participants are referred to by case numbers (1 to 8), parents are referred to as 'P', and preschool and school teachers are referred to by 'T'. Time points are named after '1' (pre-transition), '2' (first time point post-transition), or '3' (second time point post-transition). Furthermore, in the quotes the girl is named 'G' and all boys 'B'.

Procedure

Semi-structured interviews were performed on three occasions: one pre-transition, one at two months post-transition, and one at 8 months post-transition. Forty-eight interviews were collected and 47 were used for analyses (one school teacher interview was omitted due to technical problems with audio). Most interviews took place at university premises or at the child's preschool/school. The interviews lasted from forty-five minutes to ninety minutes; all were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim.

The interview questions dealt with learning, communication and participation of the child in focus, and collaboration, knowledge transfer and information in the transition process between home, preschool and school. Following the framework of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin 2009), probes as 'can you tell me more about that?' and 'what do you think about that?' were used.

Data analysis

Data from each time point was first analysed separately, and then together, following the analysis steps according to IPA (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin 2009; Smith 2011, 2004). The analysis process can be broken down into eight steps. Firstly, each transcript was read and re-read and interpretative notes of meaning making and content were written in the left margin of each transcript. In a second return to each transcript condensed interpretations of meaning were sought and listed for each transcript on the right side of each manuscript. A third return to each transcript identified categories in each interview, and corresponding quotes. Fourthly, categories and interpretative notes were compared across transcripts and some categories were merged with others, re-conceptualised or omitted. Fifthly, categories were then clustered and merged into subordinate themes following similarities. I the sixth step, subordinate themes were compared across

Table 1. Characteristics of participants, transitions and data collection.

					Sta	Stakeholders interviewed	
			В	Educational transition	(in total 48	(in total 48 interviews over 3 time points)	oints)
	Child's disability* according to parents	Child's sex	Transition			< 2 months Post-	> 8 months Post-
Š.	and teachers	and age	from	Transition to	Pre-transition	transition	transition
_	Mild ID, need AAC, concentration	Boy, 5 years Preschool		CSSID school	Mother,	Mother,	Mother,
	difficulties				Preschool teacher	School teacher	School teacher
7	Moderate ID, need AAC, concentration	Boy, 5 years Preschool	Preschool	CSSID school	Mother,	Mother,	Mother,
	difficulties				Preschool teacher	School teacher	School teacher
m	Mild ID, need AAC, hyper activity,	Boy, 6 years Preschool	Preschool	CSSID school	Mother,	Mother,	Mother,
	concentration difficulties				Preschool teacher	School teacher	School teacher
4	Mild to moderate ID, need AAC	Boy, 6 years Preschool		CSSID school	Mother,	Mother,	Mother,
					Preschool teacher	School teacher	School teacher
2	Moderate ID, need AAC, autistic features	Boy, 6 years	Preschool	CSSID school	Father, Preschool teacher	Father, School teacher	Father, School teacher
9	Mild ID, need AAC, autistic features	Boy, 6 years	Preschool	CSSID school	Mother and Father, Preschool	Mother and Father,	Mother and Father,
					class teacher	School teacher	School teacher
7	Moderate to severe ID, need AAC	Girl, 6 years	Preschool	Inclusive education in regular	Mother, Preschool class	Mother,	Mother, School teacher
			class	primary school	teacher	School teacher	
8	Mild ID, need AAC	Boy, 7 years	Preschool	Inclusive education in regular	Mother, Preschool teacher	Mother and father,	Mother and father,
			class	primary school		School teacher	School teacher

*The children had one or a combined set of diagnoses, e.g. Down's syndrome, Fragile X, ADHD, Autism, severe language impairment. In order to ensure anonymity, the names/aetiology of all syndromes have been left out.

transcripts and some subordinate themes were merged with others, re-conceptualised or omitted. Seventhly, subordinate themes were compared across transcripts for all time point and some subordinate themes were again merged with others, re-conceptualised or omitted. As a final step, subordinate themes for all time point were clustered into master themes in an iterative comparative process that gave dimensional representations of all the data.

Through the whole analysis process similarities and differences were found and analysed within and across transcripts and time points in an iterative process from parts of data to the whole data set. The analysis was mainly done by the first author but in collaboration with the second author. In order to improve validity of interpretations, the authors engaged in 'checking procedures' concerning the meanings of individual statements, categories, subordinate themes and master themes. Member checking for the participants was done by sending them a copy of the draft of their interview after each interview session.

Findings

Three master themes were found 'Organising for Child Well-being', 'Adapting Strategies for Learning', and 'Processing Time', see (Table 2). Descriptions of each master theme with its subordinate themes are presented below with the categories and verbatim quotes from participants as illustrations of the contents.

Theme 1: Organising for Child Well-being

The way in which parents and teachers perceived and responded to children's learning was by overall organising for child well-being. In their views and experiences divergent approaches to learning could be seen, as well as to the professionalism of teachers. The organisation for child well-being was driven by perceptions about child vulnerability and the organisation of support for learning.

Approaches to learning

There were variations in how participants approached learning and these were demonstrated in the perceptions of inclusive/non-inclusive perspective, typical developmental perspective and holistic perspective. Inclusive/non-inclusive perspective denoted when preschool or school organised for child learning either inclusively, in the group of preschool or school class, or individually, as in separating the child from the group. This could manifest in, for example, that the child was systematically taken aside to sit with the preschool teacher and play.

We sit with one car each and drive towards each other, and play and hum and crash. So he has these one-on-one times when he plays. If he is in free play situations and gets into it by himself, he starts with his behaviors. Shaking and spinning and so. (3T1)

Typical developmental perspective denoted the view that child learning followed typical developmental steps and, thus, the responses were focused on arranging specific learning situations and possibilities for learning achievements.

 Table 2. Results presented as master themes, subordinate themes and categories.

Master										
themes		Organising for	for Child Well-being			Adapting Strate	Adapting Strategies for Learning		Proces	Processing Time
Subordinate	Approaches to	Professionalism	Child	Unclear	Teaching	Teaching	١,		Smooth	Progression of
Themes	Learning	Themes Learning of Teachers	Vulnerability	Organization of Support			ships		Transition	Transition Development
Categories	Inclusive/non-	Expectations of	Categories Inclusive/non- Expectations of Understanding	Uncertainty		Using concrete	Using concrete Affirmation	Ways to	Prepara-tion	Child
	inclusive	competence	child abilities	about		materials	Especially close	collaborate		Autonomy
	perspective	Professional	Understanding	responsibility		Supporting	relationships	Consensus		Openness
	Typical	flexibility and	child behaviour	Uncertainty	Joyful and	communica-	Peer	between		
	develop-	tentativeness		about		tion	acceptance and	settings		
	mental			pedagogical			feelings of	Involving		
	perspective			roles			togetherness	external		
	Holistic				interaction as			profession-		
	perspective				a means to			als		
					learning					

They have a curriculum and from the beginning there was a lot of focus on integrating him into the group which we saw became a problem, because he does not work like the other children, and he cannot sit still at circle time and such things. So we asked that they change their mindset because he has other needs. But this has been quite difficult and we have had many discussions. (2P1)

Participants who held a holistic perspective on learning embraced the child's overall needs and abilities, and accordingly adjusted for child learning. For example, a teacher responded holistically by seeing to the child's need for resting during daytime and that it was prioritised for the child to be able to participate, and learn, in other school activities.

B still needs to sleep 45 minutes ... he then watches something on the iPad, a short film, or sometimes he doesn't want that anymore. And then we have a short job session. (2T3)

Professionalism of teachers

Parents had expectations that teachers should be professionally competent in taking care of their children and their children's needs and learning. Although, there was a discrepancy in expectations of competence and actual competence. Some parents perceived that teachers did not respond good enough, although there were also parents who were positively surprised about teachers' competence. Overall, parents were convinced about the special competence of CSSID teachers, and they did not expect the same from preschool teachers:

... and the fact that they have the knowledge, they only work with these children so they can, and they know, and they have tools other than preschool, which in itself he liked very well. But they are not trained for it. (6P2)

At the same time, there were many examples of professional tentativeness and flexibility of teachers, for example, how to handle a child's fixations and how to reduce time spent in stereotypic behaviour.

A has been very enthusiastic in shaking things.... he gets very occupied.... He gets stuck in it. And at home too. And he has become really angry if he has seen a good bucket up on a shelf and has not been allowed to have it. And such things can be used, I think. In both work and leisure. So now we have done so that he has a picture of his bucket, and he gets to work for it. So we have a bucket and then a quarter of the picture is moved on a ladder and fixed. So that when he gets four pictures of this whole picture then he has access to the bucket.... For a while. And then the stress level has dropped. That he knows he can have the opportunity to do this. He is not forbidden all the time. (2T3)

Child vulnerability

During the transition from preschool to school, parents and teachers sought to understand children's behaviours and children's abilities at all times. The children's abilities were often not the same as the abilities of peers, neither in learning achievements or in daily functioning. This meant that most children needed a lot of care support at preschool and school. Neither were the children's abilities stable and daily fitness governed what school days would be like:

... and it can change from day to day too, if G wants to answer, or if she is tired or things like that. (7T2)



The children's idiosyncratic responses in learning situations made parents and teachers to constantly need to respond tentatively. Child behaviour could be acute and difficult to handle both in school and at home:

Helmet is important to wear.... because when he gets frustrated and disappointed outdoors, if something goes wrong, he bangs his head to the ground. (6T1)

The perceptions and responses to child vulnerability were primarily linked to achieving child well-being in everyday lives, and the conception was that this, in turn, would set the scene for learning.

Unclear organisation of support

Parents' and teachers' out spoke confusion about the organisation of support for child learning in the transition from preschool. There existed uncertainty about responsibility of who should give support for child learning. Many were worried that the support would be discontinued in the transition to the new school setting.

The problem now is that she [the assistant] has got a job in her home municipality, so now G is out of resources, and then they have taken two people from school who already were at the premises, that share it. So now I feel that all of the things with signs they've worked with just disappear. (7P1)

Also, there were variations in how preschools and schools had arranged for supporting child learning There was no common structure, rather each case had its own circumstances: some children had a personal assistant, others had no specific staff designated for them while, for others, the turnover rate of the support staff affected the support. Furthermore, parents and teachers perceived that there were vaque boundaries in pedagogical roles of teachers and assistants and that the roles changed over time.

They start by being all together [the whole class], and then they [the assistant and child] do what they can together in the class and sometimes they go to another room and work with materials. But it is always the head teacher who plans for G. (7P3)

Theme 2: adapting strategies for learning

Participants perceived and responded to the children's learning by adapting strategies for learning. Adapted teaching strategies and adapted teaching materials were readily used and described, but trusting relationships and collaboration were also core components as strategies for learning.

Teaching strategies

Teachers and parents perceived that the children learnt best in structured activities that were prepared, organised and regular. Routines were used as organising principle and in structured activities children were perceived to learn from repetitions and positive feedback.

He responds very well to a lot of praise, and that you train often as I talked about, so it is also how they work, they create routines and so on. Because then he works best. (2P1)

Participants also responded to children's learning by focusing on joyful and playful learning. Passable ways to learning were to motivate by play, to encourage participation and for the adults to act as role models:

I think it was actually the assistants who did not stop. They continued to participate and did not make such a big deal out of that she did not want to join in, they tried to fool around a little, and tried to get her to ... You have to kind of play it out. (7T2)

Furthermore, peer interactions were perceived as means for learning. The social learning of being close to peers and together with peers were highlighted. Children were perceived to follow the lead of other children, to learn by observation and to be motivated together with peers.

... and here he has classmates who he notices doing things he may not have done before, for example, we were worried because he wasn't so easy to walk. He was comfortable. . . . He can walk. He has never been in any sulky now, rather, he walks long distances. (5T2)

At the same time, peer interaction was a stressor and some children needed help to balance amount and types of interactions.

Teaching materials

Children's learning was responded to by using concrete materials and by supporting communication. Concrete teaching materials were perceived to need to be fun and to tempt curiosity as well as being accessible. New technique was used, but also traditional materials were used:

He doesn't talk, but he signs the alphabet, or they can sit with the iPad or with these refrigerator letters and take out the letters we say. (4P3)

Teachers and parents responded to children's learning also by using various communication modes, for example, gestures, body language, supportive sign language, pictures and photos, diaries and multimodal communication.

Trusting relationships

There was a common perception of the importance of trusting relationships for these children's learning. Participants gave examples of being attuned to the children and to respond to their needs. They perceived that children needed affirmation about their emotions, communication and participation:

... just this; to get confirmation of communication, it's something different here than it was in preschool. So, the more he like, yes, but understands that it is worth taking to speech or signs, he also speaks more and more and communicates. (4T2)

Furthermore, the children were perceived to need especially close relationships, such a person was called a 'help-me-person' by several informants. This was connected to the perceptions of the children as needing a safe person to trust, and for the children to be able to understand and to be understood with the help of this person.

One must be one step ahead of B. He has so many fears. A lot of horror, so you have to be able to read him before certain things happen. Of course, he must be encouraged a lot, he must also face challenges. But you have to be beside him then, and help him. He shouldn't be allowed to just let reality go either. (3P1)



Lastly, peer acceptance and feelings of togetherness were also aspects of the importance of trusting relationships for learning. Participants perceived that other children had this acceptance and were mostly helpful and welcoming to the children with ID.

He is not strange to them. He can sit and spit and then they tell him that you must not do so. So it is not that they let him do whatever either. They think he should have the same rules as anyone else. It can be at PE [physical exercise class], then they think it's a bit unfair. (8T3)

Collaboration

Collaboration between home and preschool/school were highlighted. Mostly a contact book or diary was used between the settings, but also other creative more direct ways for collaboration were used. This would be, for example, SMS or MMS or even Facetime calls during the school day between support staff and parents during a direct learning activity. Consensus between home and preschool/school were seen as very important, but it was not always achieved.

They have worked a lot with pictures and so before, but, at the beginning ... we don't have time simply to sit and do that to all students. Now we have chosen to do this with B because he has a little difficulty with the language and to tell about his day at home. But I mean we can't take photos and print photos and make their own books for every student, it would never, that time does not exist. (1T3)

External professionals, for example speech- and language therapists, were consulted by preschool and school to learn more about specific children. Collaboration with external professionals was seen as supportive both to the children's learning and for professional development.

... the CSSID school has a team, it is the municipality. It is called the resource team. And there we report a case, they come once a month ... Eventually we took B as a case. And it has worked very well. (6T3)

Theme 3: processing time

Parents and teachers perceived and responded to the children's learning over the course of time and reflected on how smooth transitions were achieved. To achieve smooth transitions parents highlighted the effect preparation had on their children's learning. To be accepted, new routines had to be prepared and to be understood by the children. One parent explained how visits to the new school before the transition helped their son:

I think it is because he, that we started so early and that we did it in such small steps, and that the assistant was involved, so it was almost like an outing in preschool as well, in the beginning. So that there was something fun to do, because he had become bigger and more activity-seeking so it was good to get away from preschool, and do such an activity like that. And it worked very well, and then he became more familiar with the staff who were there, and then there is no problem when he is used to the people. (5P2)

Participants saw progression of development in certain abilities, for example communication, but their overall perceptions of development of general child learning was in how children became more self-assertive over time. Children's openness was also perceived to widen as children became less withdrawn and went from observing to participating. Furthermore, over time, parents perceived their children to feel more self-autonomous and some also acted on it in a way that changed parents' and teachers' way of responding.

... she opened the door and went to my sister's trampoline, twice. The third time she went out on the road and started to walk away. . . . But she was able to show the way back, for those who found her, so it was really lucky. ... And then we felt, no that was it. So then we called Habilitation and they have just got authorization so that they can put GPS on children, we are going to do that. (7P3)

Discussion

The aim of this study was to explore parents' and teachers' meaning making of children's learning in transitions from preschool to school, for children with intellectual disability. This study contributes to the field by providing a comprehensive qualitative understanding of stakeholders' meaning making of these children's learning through interpretative phenomenological analyses (IPA) of their perceptions and responses in their real life. The essence of the phenomenon in focus for this study was presented by three master themes 'Organising for Child Well-being', 'Adapting Strategies for Learning', and 'Processing Time'.

Theme 1 shows that meaning making of learning was defined by how parents and teachers perceived and responded to child learning by organising for child well-being. The organisation was built up by parents' and teachers' differing approaches to learning, perceptions of professionalism of teachers, perceptions of child vulnerability and unclear organisation of support. The organisation was individualised in each case by the child's own close stakeholders. This is reflected in that in all categories for the subordinate themes in this theme a division in views and experiences were shown. This is not so surprising considering several parameters in the Swedish context. For example, the Swedish decentralised organisation of education in CSSID (Wilder and Klang 2017) and special support (Wilder 2015) have produced differences in access to support and to expertise for parents and teachers concerning educational adaptations for children with ID. In our findings, the participants expressed that professional flexibility and tentativeness of teachers differed; some teachers showed great competence while others did not. What is more, the unclear organisation of support that was experienced by all cases in our study also signals that there may be a lack of expertise and accountability on organisation level for these children's and their families' needs in transitions. Furthermore, the different settings of inclusive education that exist in Swedish preschool/preschool class versus school seem to challenge teachers' views of their work and profession. While parents had a holistic perspective on their children's learning, most teachers either had an inclusive/ non-inclusive perspective or a typical developmental perspective. It should be noted that these differences in organisation of support, the professionalism of teachers, and in approaches to learning, may have importance for practice. As Rothe, Urban, and Werning (2014) showed, we would also like to call for awareness of the possibility that selective mechanisms can occur in decisions about inclusive approaches. Also, in theme 1, one subordinate theme was child vulnerability. The contents of this subordinate theme showed the children's idiosyncrasy and variations of abilities which reflect international research about the individual needs of children with ID (Beukelman and Mirenda 2013). Teachers and parents were aware of and adapted themselves to the vulnerability of the



children and this calls for ensuring stability in support over time, which was not prevalent in any of the cases in our study.

Theme 2, adapting strategies for learning, showed that parents and teachers responded to their perceptions of children's learning by adapting teaching strategies and teaching materials. Strategies and materials were individualised and entailed multimodal communication, concrete teaching material and joyous, motivational close one-on -one teaching strategies. This is in line with unanimous research about pedagogical strategies for this target group (Foreman 2009). Interestingly, several teachers and parents mentioned that a really close attentive 'help-me-person' was felt to be necessary for the children to learn in everyday learning opportunities. Trusty relationships were primarily linked to children's learning and entailed especially close relationships between teacher and child, but also in peer acceptance and feelings of togetherness. In this, affirmation of communication and of feelings was seen to be a successful approach. These findings are all in line with previous research about learning of children with ID (Dunst et al. 2001; Beukelman and Mirenda 2013), as well as in line with the social-cultural theory and pragmatism (Vygotsky 1934/1986; Dewey 1938/1997). Furthermore, also parents drew on trust in how they perceived collaboration. As seen in earlier research (Rothe, Urban, and Werning 2014) also the parents in this study trusted the professionality of teachers and strived for collaboration.

Over time there was an accumulation of experiences that parents, teachers and children made during the year of data collection and that was shown in the informants' perceptions and responses. Theme 3, processing time, captures the longitudinal features of smooth transitions and progression of child development. In recollection of the transition process preparation was perceived by parents and teachers to be a positive key element. The importance of preparation has been stressed in transition research for a long time (Dockett and Perry 2013). Furthermore, in the process of one year, children's openness became wider as children went from observing to participating in their new environment, and also children progressed in autonomy as they developed confidence. Progressions were described to be linked to trusty relationships and to teachers' attunement to child communication. In relation to Aspelin, Östlund, and Jönsson (2020) findings about special educators' view that trusty relationships with students with special needs is fundamental to successful professional work this can be interesting to further explore within the target group of students with ID.

Conclusions

Taken together, these findings paint a complex picture of how child learning is perceived and responded to by parents and teachers when children with ID transition from preschool to school. Overall, it is clear that individualisation of transitions is needed and that individualisation should be built up by close and tentative adaptations that prevail over transitions. The findings highlight the strong link between child well-being and learning and the importance of that the organisation of support should be clear and continuous over time. Our findings point to three core aspects: flexibility by staff and trans-professional collaboration, and, thirdly, the appreciation of parents' knowledge about what is best for their child.

This study has shown that for children with ID learning is a social process where close partners are very important for child well-being, and thus learning. The frame of reference of experiences that a child has lays the basis for how the child takes on new experiences (Dewey 1938/1997). Collaboration between the three settings preschool, school and home is essential in transitions. Often, common child centred work is more characterised by cooperation than collaboration. We propose that the viewpoints about child learning that parents and teachers hold need to be made visible and acknowledged in collaboration. In collaboration professionals need to work together towards a common goal (Danermark and Germundsson 2011) and collaboration demands the parties to change in the process in order to reach consensus. Exploring how dynamic collaboration can affect learning for children with ID is a future avenue of research.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

This work was supported by the Swedish Research Council under [Grant 2012-05601].

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