

# Creating Dialogue with Parents

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## **Abstract**

In Iceland the importance of parent's involvement in pre-schools is emphasized in the Pre-school Act and National Curriculum guide for preschool. According to the Icelandic Pre-school Act, one of the principal objectives of pre-school education is to emphasize co-operation with the family. A pre-school director is obliged, by the Pre-school Act article 5 (Pre-school act, 2008) to encourage cooperation between homes and pre-schools. Why is it so important that parents need to work with schools and why has it become so important for the policy maker? How do schools actually create relationships with parents? This report intends to answer these questions and aims to present issues, difficulties and achievements on improving parent teacher relations. Aiming to meet the guidelines of the Pre-school Act, Fellaborg pre-school has been active in developing good relations with parents. As a concern worker of Fellaborg, I wanted my final dissertation to be a part of parents-teacher relation development. With the support of the principal and the cooperation of the pre-school and close collaboration of ten focused families, it became possible for me to conduct an action research project.

## **Acknowledgement**

My interest in this topic started around June 2009 when my boss Sigrun Ásta Gunnlaugsdottir, the principal of Fellaborg pre-school, showed me the book (Whalley & Green, 1997). The book has been written by a group of practitioners with a range of experience in early childhood education, care, and social services. The book discusses the importance of role of the parents in their child's learning and development. Sigrun asked me if I could summarize and write down the main points of the book. I then started reading and writing points in July and little did I know that this book would lead and guide me in my future studies and interest.

In September 2009, while taking distance studies in the University of Iceland, I continued working in Fellaborg pre-school. My work had a great influence on my studies and I believe that my studies contributed to my work as well. At the end of the semester most of my reports had something to do with parent – teacher relations. Most of my final reports and essays led to the topic of home-school relations. Focusing on this topic I gained knowledge, and became aware of how important parents' contribution is in children's learning. Aiming to meet the guidelines of the Pre-school Act, Fellaborg is slowly working on parent-teacher relations. Wanting to learn, discover, and develop home-school relations, I asked Sigrun Ásta if I could conduct an action research in Fellaborg for my final thesis.

To begin with, it is important to address the current situation of Fellaborg pre-school. This small pre-school is located in suburb of Reykjavik. The pre-school is run by

Reykjavik city and the pre-school follows the Icelandic national curriculum. However, unlike most pre-schools around Reykjavik, the majority of the children in Fellaborg come from different cultural backgrounds. There are 56 children and 60 percent are from 10 different countries such as Poland, Serbia, Kosovo, Portugal, Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, America, Ethiopia and Shrilanka (Gunnlaugsdottir & Larsen, 2006-2008).

Before moving to the next part of this report, I want to acknowledge that this report only covers the starting point of the project, ranging from December 2009 to March 2010. The teachers and staff of the pre-school are still in the process of acting, observing, and reflecting. This action research so far has not finished its last stage, the school views as an ongoing. Therefore the findings in this report, focuses on the discussion of the current situation and also discusses successes and difficulties in carrying out this action research.

## Chapter 1

### Literature Review

#### 1.1

##### National Curriculum

Before discussing the importance of parent-teacher relations, I would like to first quote a few lines from the National curriculum guide for pre-schools. I feel it is important to address the National Curriculum, because this proves how important it is to conduct a project that helps to develop good communication with parents.

*“Parents bear primary responsibility for the education and welfare of their children, while pre-school should provide parents with support in raising children. It is important to develop close co-operation and mutual trust between home and pre-schools”*  
(Ministry of Education Science and Culture, 2003).

***The objectives of parental co-operation are to:***

- *Provide parents with information on the pre-school’s activities;*
- *Provide parents with information on their child’s development and its situation at the pre-school;*
- *Gather information on the circumstances and educational views of parents;*
- *Encourage parental participation in pre-school activities*
- *Foster co-operation and exchange between the pre-school and home;*
- *Create forum for discussion and exchange of view on children’s education.*



## 1.2

### **Role of Parents**

According to many researchers, children experiences in kindergarten and Grade 1 lay a fundamental foundation, and, though schools and teachers are important, parents are keys in determining their children's experiences. It is undeniable that parents are the main stakeholder in children's development. From the developmental perspective, parents/families are considered to have a huge impact on social, emotional and intellectual development of infants and toddlers, and during the second year, parents continue to be caregivers and playmates. They also become more concerned with teaching children how to behave (or how not) in a variety of situation. According to Erick Eriksson, this is the period when socialization begins in earnest (Shaffer & Kipp, 2007). Therefore, no other adult in the pre-school can possibly know as much about the child as his parents do, and in the beginning the teacher must depend on the parent's knowledge in helping the child to settle happily in the school (Alexander, 2001).

Research also finds that parental involvement in education is linked to academic behavioral success in elementary school (Turney, 2009). Harvard Research (Kreider, 2002) describe the importance of parental involvement as:

*“First parent's involvement sends the message to their children that education is important; and those children are more likely to value education themselves. Second, parental involvement provides parents with a means of social control; involved parents*

*get to know other parents, teachers, and administration who may then discuss their children's performance with them. Lastly, involved parents are privy to information about their children and the administration of their children; if teachers tell children are struggling, parents are in a better position to intervene" (Kreider, 2002).*

### **1.3**

#### **Why start in pre-school**

The reason why pre-school need to put emphasis on parent's involvement is that research suggest that transition between early childhood and elementary school can be a crucial period in children's development and that parents have a big contribution into this transition. Early childhood education and intervention literature (Kreider, 2002) mentioned that future beliefs and practices can be affected by the way parents involve themselves. Again, according to research (Kreider, 2002), "compared to non pre-school parents (parents who do not participate);

*"parents of children who participate in pre-school activities have higher occupational aspiration for their children, more satisfaction with their children's school performance, and greater parent involvement in elementary years at home and in the school" (Kreider, 2002).*

This shows that it is very important for parents to be involved in school as early as possible because this strengthens their future home – school communication. Harvard Family Research Team (Kreider, 2002) conducted research on how an early childhood program shape parents involvement in their children's school. They began with a hypothesis that: *"parent' positive experiences with early childhood programs could help prepare them to connect with their children's elementary school"* (Kreider, 2002). By

proved their findings by interviewing over 200 families that are coming from low-income and ethnically diverse parents whose children were in kindergarten in 1995 – 1996 (Kreider, 2002). Furthermore, the participants were mostly mothers that are from across two urban and one rural area in the U.S (Kreider, 2002). “About half participated in Comprehensive Child Development Program (CCDP), a national early intervention program that offered a menu of family support services such as child care, financial assistance, referrals, a family center family social activities and parenting education” (Kreider, 2002).

Their findings included:

- *“Parents read a lot more to their children. Parents, whose children attend any pre-school or child care setting, are 10 times more likely to read to their children everyday than parents of children with no early childhood group experience”* (Kreider, 2002).
- *“Parents are more likely to visit their child’s kindergarten classroom. Compared to a control group, parents whose children attended CCDP were significantly more likely to visit their child’s classroom during the kindergarten year”* (Kreider, 2002).
- *“Parents may network more with other school parents. Research suggests that a strong peer network with other parents in the school community maybe linked to parent’s level of involvement with information about the schoo”* (Kreider, 2002)l.

These initial findings suggest that an early childhood program may help set the stage for a strong partnership across families and between families and school (Kreider, 2002).

Parents involvement in their children's learning and developmental education also help develop parents' confidence, skill, and knowledge. Harvard Family Research Team also presented three important *processes* by which parents become involved in their children's kindergarten, those parents that build forms of confidence, skill, knowledge, and connection is essential to family involvement in education (Kreider, 2002). These processes are *leadership and learning, strong patterns and information and guidance*. To give a clearer view on these processes I have directly quoted the explanation from the journal and made a simple table to make a clear point (Kreider, 2002).

Process	Description
<b><i>leadership and learning</i></b>	<p><i>“A sense of efficacy among parents can be built through exposure to <u>leadership and learning</u> opportunities in early childhood settings—a confidence which may carry over into school involvement. For example, one mother who was highly involved in an early childhood intervention program went on to work in a family center at her child's school, helping other parents, and relating comfortably as a paraprofessional to her child's teacher. She felt at ease “dropping by” her daughter's classroom to observe math instruction and tailor her at-home help with her daughter to match the classroom techniques. One mother who was very involved in leadership in her early intervention program said, “They started pull-in' things out of me that I didn't know I had within myself” (Kreider, 2002, p. 5)</i></p>
<b><i>strong patterns of involvement practice</i></b>	<p><i>“A set of skills and routines conducive to later involvement in school may be built through <u>strong patterns of involvement practice</u> established during early childhood programs. One mother who volunteered frequently during her child's preschool</i></p>

	<i>later volunteered a lot in elementary school, saying, “you learn every time you do it.” Another frequent parent volunteer in preschool wished she could continue volunteering when her children entered school, but her job and work hours prevented it, suggesting that skills must be matched by positive school and work conditions” (Kreider, 2002, p. 6).</i>
<b>information and guidance</b>	<i>“Ideas and knowledge, such as about the importance of family involvement to children's school success, can be imparted through the provision of <u>information and guidance</u> to parents during their children's early year” (Kreider, 2002, p. 6)</i>

## 1.4

### How to involve parents?

All over the world schools put effort in to developing communication with parents. According to Pen Green (Whalley & Green, 1997), there are many ways to communicate with parents. The most natural way of communication with parents is the use of talking and listening, however this must not end with just a simple chat. An early childhood educator can use strategies to encourage this daily sharing, for example, by writing things down teachers are showing parents that they value the information they have been given (Whalley & Green, 1997). Small chat may only work well with parents in kindergarten because the parents come to drop and pick up the child. Having a casual chat with parents may not be applicable in primary schools, but of course there are always other way of communicating with parents.

Harvard Family Research Team also presented in their findings ways of preventing miscommunication and promotion of family involvement in kindergarten and the elementary grades (Kreider,2002, p.6).

Offered these ideas:

- *“Host a wide array of special events prior to the start of kindergarten at an early childhood setting-such as spring teas, picnics, and kindergarten fairs. These transition-focused gatherings often have school staff, such as teachers, principals, PTA representatives, and parent liaisons present to meet parents and answer parents' questions. Schools offer similar kindergarten orientation (Kreider,2002, p.6)*
- *“Make use of routine meetings and materials, such as parent-teacher conferences, newsletters, and bulletin boards, to convey information about the child's academic and social readiness, the schools and teachers, registration dates, and other information” (Kreider,2002, p.6)*
- *“Create portfolios, memory books, and other concrete collections of children's experiences to document children's strengths and weaknesses for parents, as well as to assist in their sense of closure from the program(Kreider,2002, p.6)”.*
- *Encourage peer networking among parents, creating buddy lists and opportunities for parents to meet others who have same-age children entering the same school, or who have already been through the transition experience with an older child (Kreider,2002, p.6).*
- *Offer reassurance to parents regarding their parenting abilities and the normalcy of their anxious feelings about their child's transition into school.*

- *Personalize the school and teacher in a variety of ways, by posting photographs of the classrooms and kindergarten teachers, by having kindergarten children make invitations for preschoolers to visit their class in advance, or by sharing information about specific teachers' styles” (Kreider,2002, p.6).*

## 1.5

### **Issues in Parent – Teacher Relationship**

The challenge of communicating with parents is seen in many parts of the world. According to (Alexander, 2001), In India, teachers outside the middle class urban enclaves saw their role as essentially that of compensating for parental, cultural as well as educational deficit;- that is to say in respect of matters such as gender equalization as well as eradication of illiteracy. In France, teachers were concerned that parent were abdicating their authority in the domain of basic socialization and the inculcation of self discipline and that this was putting at risk the traditional French concept of education. The American teachers were worried about breakdown of the family life, and the additional burden it placed on them as teachers. English and American teachers made much of partnership, but also were aware that in the context of heightened accountability, the relationship could all too easily deteriorate into confrontation. Although there is plenty of evidence of warm and constructive relationships between home and school, the potential for tension in the relationship is seldom far away (Alexander, 2001).

Having dialogue with parents is not an easy task for many teachers. In many schools in different countries all over the world, teachers and parents are being challenged in creating a good dialogue with each other. Although many researchers (Kreider, 2002)



(Turney, 2009) suggest that family involvement in education can boost children's academic success, and despite that many teachers believe that to understand the child's situation and context, teachers must have the ability to work and cooperate with parents, it is still difficult for many teachers to accept or welcome parents in school. In an extreme situation, one can say

*“I became a teacher because I wanted to work with children, why do I need to work with their parents? (Whalley & Green, 1997)”.*

In addition, many teachers are afraid of letting the parents into school. In a workshop made up of a large group of teachers, they expressed many kind of anxieties, such as fear of having parents in the school because they are afraid that parents will take over, or afraid that parents will get into cliques and keep other parents out and most of all losing control of children (Whalley & Green, 1997).

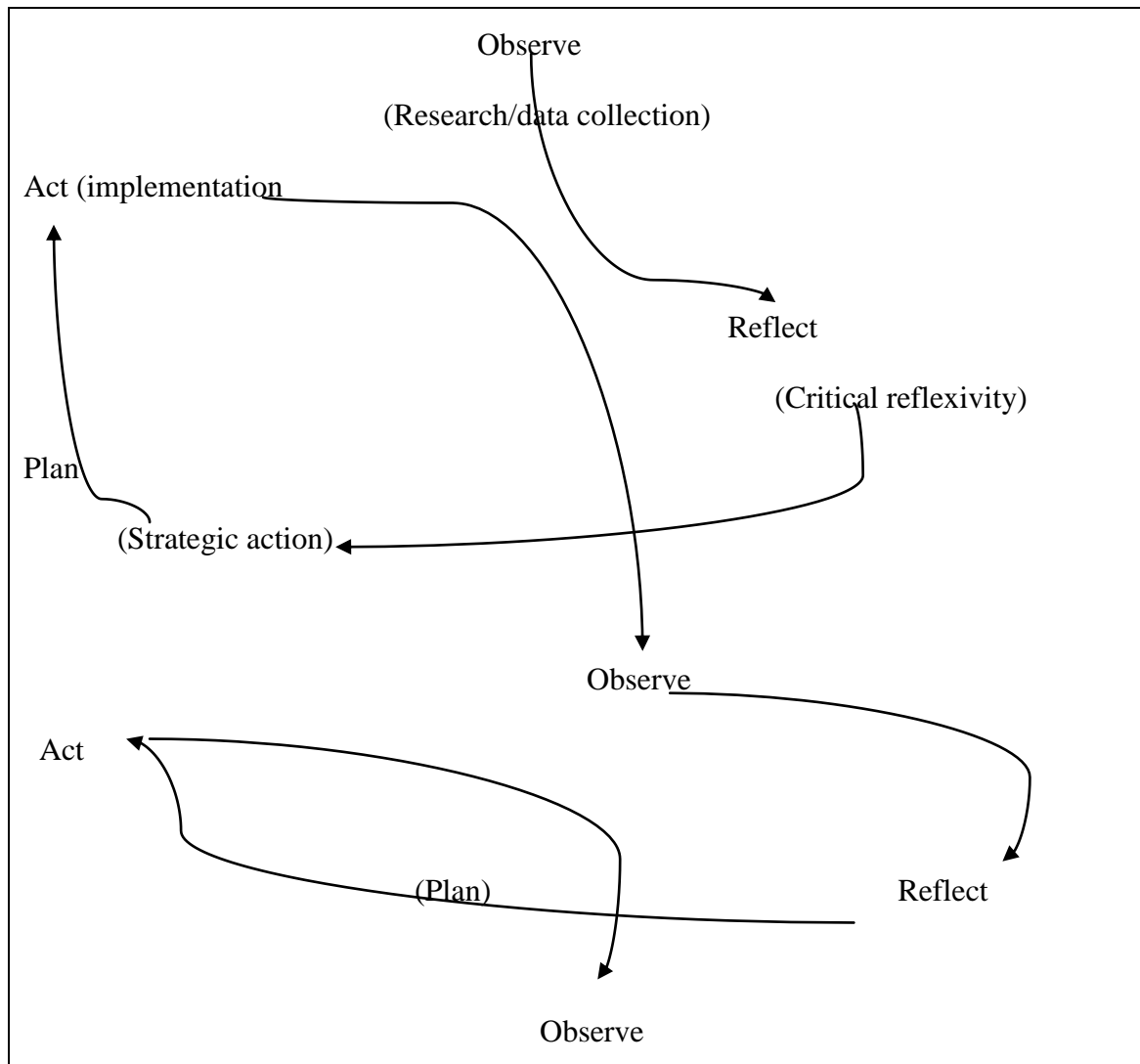
Since there are many issues regarding the parent – teacher relationship, it is probably important to acknowledge questions such as: why is it difficult? Why is it a challenge for both teachers and parents to create a good relation and communication? Is it really possible to work with parents? If so, then how? Having these questions with me, I decided to do an action research, and work with parents to find answers.

## Chapter 2

### Action Research

#### Methodology

Because of the characteristics of the research aiming to develop school-home relationship, it was necessary to use *action research method*. This method combines a substantive act with a research procedure; it is action disciplined by enquiry, a personal attempt at understanding while engaged in a process of improvement and reform (Koshy, 2005) In other words, the researcher works in close collaboration with a group of people to improve a situation in a particular setting. The researcher does not ‘do’ research ‘on’ people, but instead works with them, acting as a facilitator. In this particular project, I find it necessary to use “*O Leary cycles*”, a cycle (see figure 1) of research where it is stressed that cycles converge towards better situation understanding and improved action implementation (Koshy,2005).



(Figure 1: O'Leary's cycles of research-Koshy, 2005)

This cycle shows that the starting point of the observation where researcher gather data to use for reflection or evaluation that lead to planning followed by the action. Once the action is done another observation will take place and then again reflection will follow and re-planning or develop the plan in a better way according to the second observation. This process continues until certain goal is achieved.

### **Stage 1- Focus group interview and Individual Interview**

The purpose of this interview is to gather information about the parents' knowledge about the Icelandic pre-school and the Icelandic school system. During this stage, four families participated in the group interview and six families participated in an individual interview. By doing an open ended group interview and an individual this interview, the pre-school were able to gather information about what they needed to know about the Icelandic school system and then plan the next stage.

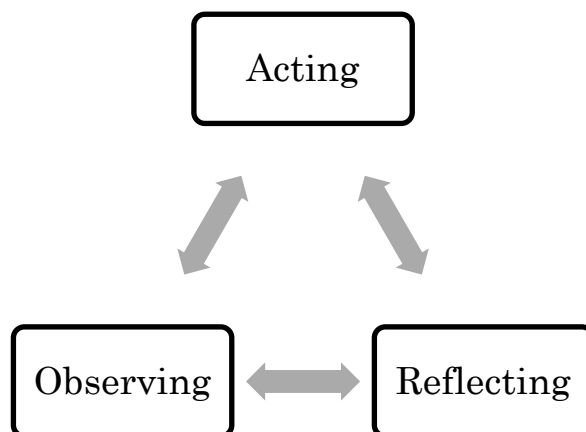
As an organizer, I prepared general questions to guide and get data from the parents. I focused mainly on their perspective by asking them questions regarding their knowledge about pre-school, what they know about pre-school, their needs, what they don't like and what do they want to improve. Communication, what they think about the way pre-school communicates with them. We used a digital recorder to record the data then meticulously transcribed it, and finally categorized the data as mentioned above.

### **Stage 2**

After analyzing the data collected from the first stage, we moved on to planning the programs. The same data was also used in a staff meeting where, I as an organizer, and the principal of the pre-school informed the other teachers and staff about parent's perspective. Teachers and staff reflected and discussed about this data and the result of this discussion is also presented in this report.

The families that were involved participated in the interview were then asked if they were willing to participate further, see if we could develop a better communication by doing activities every Saturday. Most parents were willing to join however not everyone could participate every Saturday. With the initiation of pre-school, the group came up with the idea of creating a communication book. Five families were then asked to participate in developing a communication book. The book served as a recorder of children's daily activities in school and home.

### **Stages 3, 4 and 5**



### **Acting, Observing and Reflecting**

Along with the communication book, the teachers and staff of the pre-school continue to act observe and reflect. The school sees this project as a long term commitment. Therefore the finding in this report focuses on the discussion of the current situation and also discusses successes and difficulties in carrying out this action research.

## Chapter 3

### Findings and Discussion

#### Findings in Stage 1: Result of the Interview

##### 3.1

##### **Knowledge of parents about pre-school**

Our first task in this project was gathering data by interviewing parents. The data was recorded using a digital recorder that then was transcribed and analyzed. It is very important for the pre-school to hear parent's perspective towards the pre-school. The information that was gathered from this first interview aimed to help teachers and staff of the kindergarten to be aware of their position. At the same time this interview also aimed to reach the parents.

##### 3.2

##### **Perspective of parents**

Most parents think that the main role of pre-schools is to encourage children to socialize. When parents were asked what is their general knowledge about pre-school the majority of them (both foreign and native parents) said that it is a place for children to learn how to behave and learn how to be with other children. According to the parents:

*“Pre-school is place where they learn to haga (behave)...and how to behave in”*

(Father from Iceland)

*“We think kindergarten is a start, a place to start learning habits, to learn things around, building up relationship”*

(Father from West Asia)

While parents believe that kindergarten is a place for their children to learn how to socialize, they also strongly view it as a place for babysitting. Pre-school is a place for a child to spend their day while their parents are working. All of the parents agreed that kindergarten is very important in the society because they can go to work without worrying about their children.

*“En samt, það er ljótt að segja, það er líka í leiðini pössun”* (It is not nice to say, but it is also a place for babysitting)

(Father from Iceland)

*“What I like about kindergarten is that I can go to work. I can go to work without worrying about my child”*

(Mother from South East Asia).

Most of the parents see the kindergarten as an important part of the society not from the academic perspective rather from the economical point of view. In other words, they look at kindergarten as an institution to place their child while they are working. Kindergarten is the institution to help the family economically. Initially they are not really concerned about the children pedagogic learning but are more concerned of who will take care of them while they are working for their family.

*“Það er nefnilega grun fyrir við getum að unið fyrir fjölskyldunni”* (It is necessary for us, for us to be able to work for our family)

(Icelandic Father)

*“Pre-school is a start up for kids, you know, when parents start working they have to meet new kids”*

(Father from West Asia)

*“From my part, I don’t worry about my child, she is safe while I am at work, she is in good hand and she is communicating with children.*

(Icelandic Mother)

While most of the parents see the pre-school as a place for babysitting some of them also confess about their lack of knowledge about pre-school. One Icelandic mother said that her first perception was wrong:

*“At first I see the place as a geymsla (a place where you put things). It is probably my fault because I didn’t research. But after months and years I start to realize that my child is learning so much, she is learning things like colors, how to count and many more! Then ding! I realize, it’s a school, they are learning”.*

(Icelandic Mother).



One mother also confessed that her first perception was just exactly the same as the other mother. But she also said that before she believed pre-school is a place for children to learn many academic things because in her country pre-school is treated as a school:

*“In my country, we believe that pre-school is a school, but I don’t know why I think the same as Icelandic people, maybe because that is the way people here think and I think the same”.*

(Mother from South East Asia)

### 3.3

#### **Communication**

Parents that participated in the interview felt there was a need to improve the communication between school and home. At first parents expressed their concern about the communication between them and their child, especially those parents of children 4 to 6 years old. Most of the parents agreed that it was difficult to get information from them. Children would not tell them, or children tended to be hesitant when talking about their activities in school. Most of the parents also thought that children just easily forgot what had happened the whole day, and some of them also assumed that the child was just tired and that they didn’t want to talk about the pre-school.

*“My son never tells me what happened in school, I think, because he is just tired”*

(Mother from South Eastern Europe)

*“I want to hear from her about what happened in pre-school but, okay, they are here 8 hours a day, and it is difficult for them to say what happened” (Icelandic Mother).*

*“Yeah, it’s a routine you know, we ask him, we try to get information. He doesn’t forget but he says the same answer, like he only says “he ate fiskur (fish) súpu (soup), that all he eats, but of course we know he ate different things, he a child you know, often forgets things” (Parents from West Asia)*

The interviews about communication progressed. The families then started to express their view on how the pre-school communicate with them and how they themselves need to improve. The scene shifted in the group interview to a realization of how important this project is, most of them realized how important it is to communicate with the school and they expressed how happy they were, to be part of this interview.

Parents then started analyzing what kind of information they are not getting from the pre-school. At first they criticized how the school communicates with them and then they also analyzed and criticized the way they behave most of the time. One father claimed that they never had a chance to speak out. Some of them claimed that the pre-school never really asks their opinion. At first they criticized how badly the school communicates with them and then they commented on the importance of the interviews that were being conducted some of them also criticized the way they (parents) behave most of the time. Some parents also expressed their fears of involving themselves in pre-school.

*“Þess vegna sko, það sem manni finnst frábært er að þu ert að leyfa okkur ... þú er að taka okkur sko, draga okkur svolítið inn í.”*(What I think is, it is amazing that you give us a chance, you are dragging us inside, dragging us a little bit inside).

(Icelandic Mother).

*Some parents may ask “What am I doing here? What do you expect from us and...? Maybe in the beginning it will be difficult”*

(Mother from South East Asia)

Many of them claimed that they don't know how to participate or some of them were afraid that they might say something stupid or saying something wrong. All of the participants agreed that the group interview is a good first step. They came to the conclusion that this step will contribute to the improvement of home school communication.

The data from the interview also showed that most parents are not aware of the pre-school curriculum. They are also not aware of the curriculum guide and for pre-school set by the Ministry of Education. 9 out of 10 families we interviewed claimed that they never read the National Curriculum and only few of them read the school curriculum. The data from the interview also showed that parents are not aware of importance of pre-school in their children's education. This fact and information is really sad. It contradict to what researchers (Turney, 2009) said about how the knowledge of and involvement of parents linked to academic success of children. If

parents do not show or develop a habit of reaching and getting information from pre-school, it is more likely, according to (Kreider, 2002) that the same pattern will continue when their children start Elementary school.

### 3.4

#### **Stage 2: Teachers Point of View**

After having the interview with the parents, we then moved to the staff meeting. This meeting aimed to inform teachers and staff about the interview with parents and aimed to get their opinions leading to more reflection and action (O' Leary's cycles of research, Koshy,2005).

The meeting with the staff was a little bit difficult. Most of the staff agreed that pre-school is a place for baby-sitting and their work is very important for Icelandic community. However, some took the result of parent's interview as criticism. First, some blamed the parents in their lack of knowledge about the curriculum. Secondly, some took the comments of parents about communication as a criticism, and many expressed their anxiety. Here I quoted some of their comments and reactions:

- *“We always put newsletter on the door but they never read them”* (Pre-school assistant teacher)
- *“Am I not communicating well!? I think we are all doing our best to communicate!”*(Pre-school assistant teacher).
- *“I really feel uncomfortable when I have to ask the parents 3 times to participate in our activity”* (Pre-school assistant teacher).

- *“We cannot really chat with parents for a long time, because we have to take care of other kids too?”*(Pre-school teacher).
- *“Don’t we have enough projects going on? I think we should slow down and do less project”* (Pre-school assistant teacher).

In the middle of the meeting we looked at research about how important parent’s involvement in children’s learning is, and the principal also pointed out what is written in the National Pre-school curriculum guide. It became clear that many staff were not familiar with these changes in the curriculum. Many admitted that they were not aware that parental involvement is emphasized in the curriculum. This finding relates to what Whalley and Pen green institute illustrates about the anxieties of teachers (Whalley & Green, 1997) (see page 12 of this report). Although it is not exact the same situation, somehow the way teachers express their view and fears towards parents are almost comparable.

### 3.5

#### **Stage 3 and 4 (Observation + Reflection)**

##### **Putting effort on parent’s involvement**

As part of our observation and reflection, we found it necessary to reflect and see how Fellaborg developed parents-teacher relations. Below, are 2 different charts that I, the principal, and other staff member created to analyze the development of home – school relationship. Chart 1 shows, how Fellaborg reached out to parents, and also shows in what way parents were involved in year 2008.

Time	Reaching parents	Involvement of parents
2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Website</li> <li>● Parent's individual meeting (2 times a year.)</li> <li>● Home visiting for new families.</li> <li>● Newsletter (hang on the entrance or send by mail)</li> <li>● Putting up pictures of children on the door of each department. The purpose of these pictures is to show children's activity. The pictures often come with 2 or three sentences describing what the children are doing in the pictures.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Sumer field trip with parents (once a year)</li> <li>● Open house (parents are invited once a year to see the children's work)</li> <li>● Week event such as "stjarna vikunnar" One child is chosen every week to be star of the week the child then can come with toys books and music from home. The parents are also encouraged to come and share something from home e.g. parents can come and read books or talk about their work, etc.</li> </ul>

*(Fellaborg Parents – Teachers Relation; Chart 1)*

Chart 2 shows how Fellaborg added more and more activities to reach and involve parents. From the spring 2009, Fellaborg opened the school and tried to invite parents as much as possible.

Time	Reaching Parents	Involvement of Parents
From Spring 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Website</li> <li>● News letter (hang on the entrance or send by mail)</li> <li>● Putting up pictures of children on the door of each department. The purpose of these pictures is to show children's activity. The pictures often come with 2 or three sentences describing what the children are doing on the pictures.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● (same activities in pre-2009)</li> <li>● Philippine day (Filipino parents cooked food and invited other parents)</li> <li>● International day (parents helped their children to do a presentation of their countries, and presentation of other things such as hobby or interest.</li> <li>● Inviting parents every Friday to eat breakfast with the children.</li> <li>● Opening one department for parents every Fridays. Here, parents get a chance to do some fun activities, like knitting with the teachers. The parents also get a chance to see what their children are going to do in the kindergarten.</li> </ul>

*(Fellaborg Parents – Teachers relation; Chart 2)*

Chart 1 and 2 show that there is more parental involvement in 2009 than 2008. In 2009, the school encourages parents to come into school. The school invited parents hoping to create a good relationship. However this chart also shows that parents weren't given

chances to speak out. The school offered activities, but did not really consider the reaction of parents. The comparison of these charts also showed that the way Fellaborg reached out to parents was exactly the same in 2009 and 2008. The chances for parents to communicate were clearly limited. This chart also answers the question of why parents claimed that communication needs to improve. Once again, these relate to the objectives of parental co-operation presented in the curriculum (National Curriculum Guide for Preschool, 2003). If we will see a closer look, the objectives are more focus on reaching parents more than involving them. The objective emphasize the importance of giving and receiving information. In other word, reaching (giving and getting information) them is as important as welcoming their presence (involvement) in the pre-school.

#### **Stage 4 and 5 (Reflection +Action)**

The way Fellaborg created their communication from 2008 to 2009 is comparable to the idea presented in an annual conference of kindergarten teachers in National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) (see page 9 of this report). However, there the communication and effort can still be developed in a much better way. Therefore, as part of reflection and action, we also draw a chart that reflects our current activities and future plans. Here we included stage 1 of action research, communication book (will be discuss later in this report), open house and seminars for parents.



Time	Reaching Parents	Involvement of parents
From December 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● ( All the activities on Pre-2009)</li> <li>● Action Research ( Stage 1)</li> <li>● Communication book (five families join to see if this book will improve communication between home and school)</li> <li>● White board for each department (Instead of putting up pictures, teachers will then just write information about children's activities each day)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Same activities as Pre-2009</li> <li>● Same activities as 2009</li> <li>● Open house once a week (All departments are open for parents. They are welcome to visit and see their children's activities)</li> <li>● Seminars for parents. (Fellaborg will invite the parents for seminars and meetings)</li> </ul>

*(Fellaborg Parents – Teachers relation; Chart 3)*

### 3.6

#### Stage 3-4 Acting + Reflecting

##### Communication Book

As one of the action in this research the idea of a communication book was developed. To begin with, we asked 5 families to join and be part of the communication book. The communication book is a simple note book where parents and Fellaborg will write about the activity of each child. The teachers and staff were to write a few sentences about the child's activities and other special events that happened each day. Teachers and parents were also encouraged to write about how each child would play eat, and sleep. They

were also encouraged to ask questions and write a comment about things they think are important.

### **Attitude towards the communication book**

This idea was at first criticized by many staff. Many of them did not understand the idea. The first two weeks were really difficult: Many staff members showed a negative attitude and refused to be a part of the communication book. Many said that they have enough to do and that it is not possible for them to write a diary for each child. However, three pre –school teachers participated actively. On the second and third week of the communication book, other staff members also showed interest. Many staff member became interested on what was written in the book and some of them read it and commented on what parents said.

Four out of five families participated actively. Two families wrote and recorded their children's activities. The other two shared their children's activity two to three times a week. Four out of five participants wrote actively during the weekend.

## **3.7**

### **Stage 4: Reflection**

When we reached the fourth and the fifth week, teachers and staff reflected on their experience of the communication book. Amazingly none of the staff member showed a negative attitude. Many of them found the communication book important. Many of them also suggested ways of how and when to use the communication book. Teachers and staff said:

*“So the parents know what their child is doing I am a mother too, I want to know what my child is doing at school” (Assistant Teacher).*

*“It is also for us to reflect and we see how that child is, for example with Kristjan, we did not know that the child is also having problem eating at home. Because of this book we became aware of this problem and we put effort on working on his problem” (pre-school teacher):*

*“I think it is good for us then we became aware of the child’s development, as teachers and staff we usually forget what happened or what activity each child is interested in. Also by having this diary we can see later if a child spends so much time on computer for example, if we are aware of their activity then we can encourage them to try other things, it is our responsibility to guide them”(pre- school teacher).*

*“I think it is really good to have the communication book especially for those children that are very difficult. We can write about their behavior here and their parents can write their behavior at home then we can work by comparing the two” (pre-school teacher)*

Parents also had positive comments about the communication book- they liked reading about their child’s activities. However, most of them claimed that it was too difficult to find time to write in it.

*“I really like it, but it is difficult to write in it every day and sometimes I forget, but I like reading it. I feel safe you know”*

(Mother from South East Asia)

*“I think writing once a week or twice will be good, but I really like reading it every day”*

(Icelandic Mother)

All of them claim that they feel safe, and they will develop more trust, and work more with the teachers if they have good communication. Some parents also showed their concern about what should be written in the communication book one mother said;

*“It is good to get the communication book, but I really want to see more, like, if he learned new things or they are learning alphabet or numbers. I also want to know about his behavior; if he is acting bad or sad or happy and why he is acting like that you know. I also don't see the point of getting the book every day. Maybe it is good to get it every Friday, teachers can write in it the whole week then we will get it on Friday. If teachers write something about their academic work and development, I think I will develop more trust and I can actually work at home with my child”.*

(Mother from Eastern Europe)

Although parents and teachers/ staff find it difficult to write, it is clear that both parents and teachers think that the communication book is important. It is important for teachers because they can reflect on it, and it can be useful to guide them with their decisions in the classroom, and it will give them ideas on how to meet each child's needs. For

parents, the book is important because they actually get information about their child's activity and that allows them to about their activity at home and also hopefully that they can work with their children at home. However, both parents and teachers find it difficult to find time.

### **3.8**

#### **Difficulties and Achievement**

##### **From my Journal**

Before moving on to the end of this report, I would like to share my personal thoughts on working on this project. Conducting action research was not easy; first of all, it was really difficult to reach parents and then it was difficult to get understanding from my co-workers. Getting parents to come in the group interview was not easy. It was not enough to send them a letter or hang the letter on the wall. I had to communicate with them individually and I had to explain what I was going to do in detail. Although most of them said yes for the group interview, only 4 families showed up. Individual interviews were easier to conduct. Parents welcomed me in their homes, and most of them were willing to participate and shared a lot of thoughts.

As part of this research, I asked each parent their reason why they couldn't come to the group interview. Most of them said that the time and day did not suit them some claimed that they were shy and did not really know how to do it. One parent actually claimed that they were afraid that they might say something stupid. As I said earlier, it was difficult to interview them in a group but most were willing to open their home and participate. This experience of mine made me really believe that parents really want to

participate if there is someone who will guide them, and if school really communicates with them well.

The meeting with teachers and staff was really difficult in the beginning. I had to admit that when I was explaining and introducing the project, many showed their unwillingness to participate. When the principal gathered us in a meeting, many showed a negative reaction to the project, especially to the result of the parent's interview. I had to admit that it was really difficult for me and I felt like I was causing so much tension between myself and my co workers. Luckily, the principal of the Fellaborg knows how to communicate with them and knows that this tension is just in the beginning. She encouraged me to continue and gave her full support. As you see in this report, especially when we implemented the communication book, teachers and staff showed their interest and now the whole school continue to work together to create a good communication.

In Iceland the importance of parent's involvement in pre-school is emphasized in the Pre-school Act (2008) and National Curriculum guide for preschool Ministry of Education Science and Culture, 2003). According to the Icelandic Pre-school Act, one of the principal objectives of pre-school education is to emphasize co-operation with family. It becomes so important that parents need to work with school because research finds that parental involvement in education is linked to academic behavioural success in elementary school (Turney, 2009). First parent's involvement sends message to their children that education is important; and those children are more likely to value education themselves. Second, parental involvement provides parents with a means of

social control; involved parents get to know other parents, teachers, and administration who may then discuss their children's performance with them. Lastly, involved parents are privy to information about their children and administrations about their children; if teachers become aware of that children are struggling, parents are in the better position to intervene (Kreider, 2002). Furthermore, the reason why pre-school needs to put emphasis on parent's involvement is that research suggests that transition between early childhood and elementary school can be a crucial period in children's development and that parents have a big contribution into this transition.

Aiming to meet the guidelines of pre-school Act, Fellaborg have been active in developing good relations with parents. With close collaboration of ten focused families, it became possible for me and Fellaborg to conduct an action research project. The following part intends to discuss my conclusion by presenting the theme that emerged from this study, and relating my findings to what others have found. My conclusion also presents the future direction of this study.

### **3.9**

#### **Tension in communication**

It became clear in the interviews conducted in stage 1, that parents were not aware and seemed not so familiar with the current role of pre-school. As I mentioned in chapter 4, while most parents see the pre-school as a place to learn and develop their social skills, they also see the pre-school as a place for babysitting. The interview showed that the parents see the pre-school as less academic. Ten out of ten parents see the pre-school more as a babysitting institution than a learning institution.

While analyzing the data, I kept asking myself why parents do not see pre-school as an academic institution. I think that many parents do not put too much emphasis on their children's learning in pre-school, because they are not really aware of importance of early childhood education for their children. They are also not aware that their involvement is very important for their children's development and their own development. Why aren't they aware? Could it be because of lack of communication?

While parents complain about the level of communication, teachers and staff of the pre-school were sure that they always provide information by hanging news and letters on the door, as well as sending e-mail to parents. Moreover, teachers and staff complain about the parents' lack of participation, but are not aware that parents need assistance to be involved. The result of the staff meeting shows that teachers and staff feel that many parents are not willing to participate, on the other hand, parents claimed that some of them, are afraid, or really don't know how and when to participate. Teachers tend to assume that parents will automatically be involved if they invite them in school or open the school.

Developing good communication between home and school is certainly not easy. Despite the effort of involving the parents by doing activities in 2009, the result of the interview in stage 1 still showed poor communication levels. The objectives of parent co-operation in the national curriculum emphasize the importance of *reaching the parents* or listening to parent's perspective. Fellaborg's way of communicating with parents is divided into two categories "*Reaching Parents and Parents involvement*" (see



Fellaborg parent – teacher relation chart 1-3 pp. 24-26). *Reaching parents* is the list of activities that Fellaborg use to provide parents with information and gather information about their child's situation. These activities are also intended to provide a forum for discussion. *Parents-involvement* is the list of the way Fellaborg encourages parents to be part of activities. These two plays are very important part. However, the findings shows that the school need to put more effort on "reaching out to parents", meaning there's a need of creating better communication.

## **Conclusion**

### **Further Planning, Implementation and Hope**

Just like any other school and just like the schools outside Iceland. Fellaborg will try and do their best to communicate as well as encouraging parents to participate. On their small scale, Fellaborg have created a mechanism for continuous family involvement. However this mechanism had to evolve and needed to be investigated. The most natural way for teachers to communicate is to use talking and listening but this way of communicating is not enough.

Although Fellaborg does many things as what the idea presented by the teachers NAEYC conference (Kreider, 2002), I will argue that we still need to improve and need to learn and develop our mechanism. For example, just like the idea presented in page 10, Fellaborg is on its way to creating portfolios, memory books, and other concrete collection of children's strengths and weaknesses. The result of implementing the communication book was positive. It was difficult in the beginning but then became

well received a positive feedback from both teachers/staff and parents. I think this idea should develop and hopefully become one of Fellborg's mechanism, along with other ideas presented in chart 3.

Parents are clearly aware that pre-school is a place for their children to learn how to interact with others, but they are not aware that pre-school is a place for parents to develop confidence, skills and knowledge. A page 7 to 8 of this report illustrates the process by which parents became involved and built confidence, skill and knowledge. In this action research project, this pattern is very clear. As the group continues to observe, act and reflect, the parents start to participate more. In a small scale, parents start to participate and contribute. According to the principal, there are more and more parents contributing in the school and that is very good not only for the children but also for the parents. One Icelandic mother said, when we conducted the first interview, "it is amazing that you are dragging us inside and it opens our mind and we actually gain knowledge".

As I mentioned earlier Fellborg is still in the middle of this project. Fellborg is planning to offer seminars for parents and planning to open the school for parents once a week. Just like the communication book, this activity gets so much criticism from the staff and teachers. However, the principal of the school is determined to continue and lead the teachers and staff to better development of home – school relation. The principal also said that, it is always difficult for teachers and other staff member to accept new project but after a while they become use to it and at the end appreciate the project. She said that we can see so much positive reaction from parents. She also

mentioned that because of our hard work in communicating with parents, we are getting a lot of positive reaction from parents; some parents are showing more and more willingness to participate and help in school. One parent came and gave the school 4 boxes of papers. One father offers his service of fixing furniture's in school. There are also more and more parents came every week to participate in "stjarna vikunar" (start of the week) (Fellaborg parent-teacher relation chart 1, pp. 23). A parent who is professional opera singer came to sing for children. A parent who is fisherman came to talk about his work.

I, the principal and staff member believes that if we continue working on creating good dialogue with parents, and the most important of all children will also feel happy as much as their parents do. Teachers/ assistant teachers and other staff members will also feel happy about their job and that will lead to the creation of good harmony in our school and we will all benefit from it; not only the children but all of us.

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