

International Perspectives on Educating for Democracy in Early Childhood

Recognizing Young Children as Citizens

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Chapter 18

Children's Empowered Inclusion in Early Childhood Education for Sustainability

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Introduction

In this chapter, we explore and describe what “empowered inclusion” of children means in education for sustainability¹ (EfS) in an early childhood education (ECE)² context. Our work can exemplify what empowered inclusion could mean in the recognition of children as citizens with democratic rights who can influence their daily life and activities in preschool. We explore this within the institutional context of Swedish preschools, where we illustrate steps toward empowered inclusion in terms of policy in our analysis of the revised curriculum for the preschool Lpfö 18 (Skolverket, 2018). We also provide examples from research with children as included and empowered informants both to illustrate research methodological issues as well as to indicate how EfS can be influenced by aspects of empowered inclusion. We conclude by discussing what could facilitate such processes. The concept of empowered inclusion that we explicate and explore was coined by Josefsson and Wall (2020) (see also Sporre, 2021) and emphasizes a global justice perspective on the rights of children and youth. Furthermore, the concept builds on an understanding of the human condition as being characterized by vulnerability and an interdependence of all human beings on one another (Wall, 2010).

Living in a time of accelerated change, digitalization, and globalization, children in various parts of the world are exposed to economic inequality, social injustice, human-induced climate change, and natural disasters, which either directly or indirectly affect their mental and physical well-being (Borg, 2017; Davis, 2015; Pramling Samuelsson, 2011). At present, matters of climate change can be seen as the most pressing ethical challenge facing humanity, which raises crucial questions as to what to do and how to act. Thus, the role of education becomes significant in the provision of adequate responses to such challenges (cf. Sporre, Franck, Lilja, & Osbeck, 2020). In the EfS discussion of issues concerning teaching and learning *about* and *for* sustainability, it is important to recognize the interconnectedness of environmental, social, and economic perspectives.

The environment dimension focuses on issues related to nature, animals, the ecosystem, and biological diversity, and it includes natural resources and the climate. The economic dimension includes the division of human and material resources as well as sustainable production and consumption patterns, poverty reduction, energy use, and economic equity. The social dimension refers to human rights, equity and gender equality, cultural differences, health, democracy, and the connection between the local and the global. Furthermore, in an educational sense, in an EfS and early years education context, it is important to link facts, stories, imagination, and – in preschool – play with real-life issues (Pramling Samuelsson, 2011).

Consequently, the issues of climate change and global sustainability take on an immediate urgency. This is the case not least for those who face a lifetime of apparent uncertainty – namely the world's children – who run the risk of becoming the potential victims of these challenges (Davis, 2015; Farrant, Armstrong, & Albrecht, 2012). Given the above, how can EfS in early years education be developed in such a way that it views children as citizens with the democratic right to influence their education, their daily lives, and their preschool activities? Traditionally, the word *citizen* has been understood to mean a man (cf. Lloyd, 1984) and the right to vote has often been exclusive to men. Furthermore, to be a White man meant to have privileges (cf. Crenshaw, 1991). Underpinning such understandings was the logic that citizenry meant autonomy, rationality, and independence – not considered to be properties of all human beings. However, in recent centuries, we have seen the struggle for human rights and citizenship rights of others, including women, people of colour, people of varying genders and sexualities, migrants, and indigenous peoples (Young, 1990). Yet, at stake here are children: how can their rights as citizens be understood and how can their democratic right to influence align with their own ideas and interests in an ECE context?

Aim of This Chapter

The *aim* of this chapter is to explore the concept “empowered inclusion” in its theoretical context so that it can be used in analyses of both the curriculum for the preschool Lpfö 18 and empirical examples of research, the purpose being to assess how children can be included in their own right. In our conclusion, we highlight resources that are needed to further develop aspects of citizenship and democracy within EfS in ECE.

In the overview of the conceptual framework, as developed by Wall (2010, 2011, 2019), and Josefsson and Wall (2020), the crucial aspects of empowered inclusion are explicated. Empowered inclusion as we understand it when elaborating on and analyzing EfS in an early childhood context builds on an understanding of human beings as interdependent. Therefore, it demands in EfS a recognition of children and their concerns,

of their self-expression that is self-empowering to them. It can also mean that they can be empowered by adults in the educational context. Ways to apply the theoretical discussion below can be the identification of what aspects of the preschool practice children feel they can influence, as well as what pedagogical approaches can be identified where the interdependency of and equality between teachers and children exist when sustainability goals are actualized.

Education in Early Years and Sustainability

The United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) adopted by the UN General Assembly on November 20, 1989 (see UNICEF, 1989) has become a crucial international tool for the promotion of the rights of children, and it has formed part of Swedish law since January 1, 2020. With regard to the right of children to be included in ECE, UNESCO (2008) states that “as early childhood education is about laying a sound intellectual, psychological, emotional, social and physical foundation for development and lifelong learning, it has an enormous potential in fostering values, attitudes, skills and behaviors that support sustainable development” (2008, p. 12). The main principles of the CRC are:

- All children have equal rights and value.
- The best interests of the child shall be taken into consideration in all decisions that concern them.
- All children have the right to life and development.
- All children have the right to express their opinion and be respected.

The convention is reflected in EfS when it says that a starting point of EfS in ECE is to build on children’s participation in issues that concern their lives while viewing them as active agents and stakeholders for the future. The process of becoming engaged in sustainability and becoming a global citizen can begin in ECE.

The United Nations General Assembly resolution 70/1 “Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” adopted the 2030 Agenda in 2015. It is a plan of action for countries to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, recognize the human rights of everybody, achieve equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, and ensure the lasting protection of the planet and its natural resources (United Nations, 2015). All 193 UN member countries and actors signed the agreement on the 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) that can provide a roadmap for EfS for countries in a number of policy areas. The 17 goals are integrated and inseparable and balance the three dimensions – environment, social, and economic – of sustainability.

Goal 4.7 of the SDGs talks about ensuring that by 2030,

... all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and nonviolence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development.

(United Nations, 2015, p. 17)

Goal 16 of Agenda 2030 emphasizes the need to "... build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels" so as to promote justice for all and build inclusive societies. ECE can be understood as being an institution of importance in terms of promoting and contributing to this goal.

Preschool Education in a Swedish Context

In Sweden, preschool is a part of the national school system and is a center-based early childhood form of education. In this chapter, preschool refers to ECE in kindergarten, nursery, or pre-primary education as well as care for young children who have not yet started formal education. Preschools in Sweden can be public or private. All children can attend preschool from the age of one, and from the autumn of the year they turn three, they are entitled to three hours of free education a day or approximately 15 hours per week. In 2019, more than 95% of children aged 4–5 years attended preschool (Skolverket, 2021). Usually, the municipalities are in charge of preschool education and educational care, and allocate funding to all preschools within the local community (Ärlemalm-Hagsér & Engdahl, 2015). However, preschools can also be run by companies, parent cooperatives, and non-profit organizations.

The first national curriculum for the preschool Lpfö98 was introduced in August 1998, which was when preschool became part of the Swedish education system under the Swedish National Agency for Education (SNAE). Play, care, and the fostering of fundamental values continued to be important in Swedish preschool education (Sandberg & Ärlemalm-Hagsér, 2011). Environmental education, mentioned in the curriculum Lpfö98, has, similarly, long featured in preschool, with such activities as gardening, forest walks, and birdwatching (Ärlemalm-Hagsér & Engdahl, 2015). Since its introduction, the curriculum has been revised four times – in 2006, 2010, 2016, and 2018 – with minor changes the first three times and major changes in 2018. However, the concept of sustainability has been explicitly included for the first time in the revised curriculum for the

preschool Lpfö 18 (Skolverket, 2018). In the curriculum for preschool, the growing interests of the individual child and their active participation in society are emphasized. A child's perspective and children's perspectives have long had a place in Swedish preschool education (Borg & Pramling Samuelsson, 2022). Regarding these two perspectives, it can be said that adults develop their "child perspective" to make it possible for them to understand and explore "children's perspectives" (cf. Sommer, Pramling Samuelsson, & Hundeide, 2009). With "children's perspectives," the child is viewed as a subject that articulates their perspectives. Democracy has been important in the preschool curriculum since 1998, with space for individual children to express their views and interests, and to be listened to. The curriculum for the preschool states:

Education should be undertaken in democratic forms and lay the foundation for a growing interest and responsibility among children for active participation in civic life and for sustainable development – not only economic, but also social and environmental. Both long-term and global future perspectives should be made explicit in education. The preschool should reflect the values and rights expressed in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

(Skolverket, 2018, p. 5)

In terms of the right of children to express their views, the revised curriculum points out that education should "be based on what is deemed to be the child's best interests, that children have the right to participation and influence, and that children should be made aware of their rights" (Skolverket, 2018, p. 5). This is in line with Article 12 in the CRC which states:

State Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the voice of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

(UNICEF, 1989)

In line with this, individual children are encouraged to express their views and opinions, and it is the responsibility of teachers to ensure that children are listened to (Borg & Pramling Samuelsson, 2022). The new curriculum for the preschool Lpfö 2018 uses the concept of sustainability explicitly in relation to preschool education, teaching, and children's health and well-being. However, the concept of fostering has been deleted, whereas the concepts of care and children's well-being are expanded in relation to teaching and learning at preschool (Borg & Pramling Samuelsson, 2022).

Empowered Inclusion – Human Interdependence, Vulnerability, and Democratic Representation

Being the analytical tool of this chapter, the concept of empowered inclusion has its conceptual background in John Wall's book *Ethics in Light of Childhood* (Wall, 2010). When Wall philosophically discusses human life from the point of view of childhood, that is, with childhood as the lens, he makes the connection between the lives of human beings and the fact that our existence is grounded in relationships, in interdependency from when we are born to when we die. Furthermore, human existence is marked by vulnerability, as various forms of harm and untimely death are risks that all humans face. Wall formulates his view on human existence as being based on interdependency and vulnerability, against alternative philosophical views where the human being and human agency are seen to be characterized by autonomy, rationality, and individual freedom. Such a view of human agency – also giving a right to rights – excludes children as they are regarded as being dependent and irrational, and as needing to grow as individuals. Wall distances himself from such a view of children and human agency, and instead emphasizes a relational interdependence. As part of his ethical theory, Wall elaborates on the ethical challenges facing *all* human beings. He then emphasizes how we, given our interdependency and vulnerability, can encompass ethically challenging experiences and grow with them by way of our own creative narratives (Wall, 2010, pp. 59–86).

In his next publication, Wall moves on to discuss the shortcomings of democracy when it comes to representing children (Wall, 2011). Having looked at and critically analyzed different approaches to children's political representation and by pointing out the fact that this is not simply a question of citizenship as children can be citizens without having political influence, Wall develops the idea that for the marginalization of children to be taken seriously, a rethink is required as well as a change in the norms of recognition. When arguing for this, Wall also strongly pushes the idea that children have different situations – that they cannot be seen as *one* group with special claims; rather, they need to be able to express *their lived diversities*. Therefore, what is needed is a “difference-responsiveness” (Wall, 2011, p. 96) – a recognition of the fact that children's situations vary, and different responses are needed to address their struggles and concerns. Belonging to a “difference-responsiveness” is also the realization that *age* in the case of children limits their means as they have less experience (as compared to adults) to put forward their claims or argue their case; however, this is not to be understood as an indication that they are more irrational or less autonomous than adults. All human beings are understood to be interdependent and to use their experiences.

The idea that age adds complexity to the issue of children expressing themselves in a democratic sense is developed by Wall in an article when

he discusses global citizenship from the point of view of children (Wall, 2019). He coins the concept “deep interdependence” when talking about children and the opportunity they have to express themselves politically:

It involves more than self-expression, and more even than interdependence understood in a simple sense of mutuality or relationality. In a more complex and profound way, it involves a simultaneous dynamic of self-empowerment and empowerment from others.

(Wall, 2019, p. 11)

Here, Wall expresses the complex situation of children: at the same time, they need to address matters of their concern and empower themselves, but they may need the understanding of others and empowerment from others.

In a further publication, Josefsson and Wall (2020) coin the concept, “empowered inclusion.” Their article starts with three specific contemporary challenges to children and youth, namely child labor, migration, and climate change. In three case studies that the authors use to exemplify contemporary experiences of globalization, they describe struggles against injustice and for social justice, and how youth and children movements recognize such issues and take on these challenges. When moving on to theorizing on an empowering response in the light of such struggles, Josefsson and Wall discuss what they call “deep interdependence” and elaborate on empowered inclusion (Josefsson & Wall, 2020, pp. 1048–1053). They define empowered inclusion in the following way: “as interdependent engagement with lived experiences of difference in ways that challenge and transform shared global norms and practices” (Josefsson & Wall, 2020, p. 1053) and go on to state that this means “an *interdependent* inclusion in which all persons and groups are actively empowered to transform global power relations based on shared responsiveness to lived experiences of difference” (Josefsson & Wall, 2020, p. 1053).

An important aspect of the argument by Wall (2010, 2011, 2019) and Josefsson and Wall (2020) is that children, who make up one-third of the human population and who as a result of their vulnerability and marginalization are exposed to the most negative consequences of globalization, still have the least say and opportunities to influence: that is, their influence as citizens is limited. It can also be noted that Wall in a later publication (Wall, 2022) furthers his discussion to argue for the right of children to vote. His work has inspired discussions about children’s rights to form and express their own ethical and existential understandings in narratives at school – termed their “moral authorship,” not least in relation to their concerns for sustainability (Sporre, Lotz-Sisitka, & Osbeck, 2022).

In this overview of the conceptual framework, as developed by Wall (2010, 2011, 2019), and Josefsson and Wall (2020), the crucial aspects

of empowered inclusion are explicated. Also important for this chapter is the concept of deep interdependence, which points to the vulnerability of children in having both to identify and address matters of their concern but also occasionally needing the support of grown-ups.

Participation and Influence of the Child in the Swedish Curriculum for the Preschool Lpfö 18

Above we indicate how the emphasis on EFS, in general, was made more explicit and how clear goals were formulated for its further development in the Swedish ECE context in the curriculum Lpfö 18. However, what about the aspects of participation and influence of the child in the daily activities of preschool in that same document? What does the curriculum for the preschool Lpfö 18 say about this, and how can this be understood as more or less contributing to children's empowered inclusion and as such point to aspects of democracy and citizenship that are apparent or that could be made more prominent in the curriculum?

The opening section of the curriculum for the preschool Lpfö 18 in the paragraph on "Participation and influence of the child" states:

Education in the preschool should lay the foundations for children to understand what democracy is. The social development of children presupposes, according to their ability, that they can assume responsibility for their own actions and for the environment in the preschool. Children have the right to participation and influence. The needs and interests that the children themselves express in different ways should provide the foundation for shaping the environment and planning the education.

(Skolverket, 2018, p. 17)

In this paragraph, connections are made between democracy and the ability of children to assume responsibility for their actions and the environment of preschool. Also mentioned is the right of children to participate and influence. It also states that the needs and interests that children themselves express should provide the foundation for shaping the environment and planning education in ECE.

Looking at this from the perspective of empowered inclusion, one can note that children's self-expressions, needs, and interests are said to be the foundation for both the shaping of the environment in preschool and the planning of its education. Ideally, if this was put into practice, this would mean that the teachers, being adults, could empower the children in the preschool context by taking their expressed needs and interests seriously when planning. Likewise, the statement on children's right to participate and influence is clear and direct in its support for the empowerment of

children. However, on the other hand, when the responsibility of children is referred to in the sentence “The social development of children presupposes, *according to their ability*, that they can assume responsibility for their own actions and for the environment in the preschool” (our italics), this could be pointing in a direction where it is through the eye of the teacher, of the adult, that the ability of children is judged. The idea that children can assume responsibility may be undermined if children are not judged to be responsible enough. What this points to is that children need teachers who understand that their responsibility is to include children and, in a wider perspective, understand human beings as being on an equal footing.

A similar tension can be detected when the guidelines for the work team are described in the curriculum. The work team is to:

- promote the ability of children to participate and exert influence over their education, ...
- promote the ability of children to assume responsibility for themselves and for coexistence in the group of children, ...
- prepare children for participation and responsibility, and for the rights and obligations that apply in a democratic society.

(Skolverket, 2018, p. 17)

Here the language can be interpreted as putting the adults (teachers and childcarers) in a “more-knowing-position,” since they are to “promote” and “prepare” and may forget what it takes to empower through inclusion. Such a respectful pedagogical approach is more clearly expressed when the rights of children are mentioned. The same paragraph also states that the work team should:

- respect the right of each child to express her or his opinions with different forms of expression, and to ensure that children’s perceptions and opinions are taken into account and expressed in education, ...
- make sure that all children have equal influence over and scope for participating in education regardless of gender, ...

(Skolverket, 2018, p. 17)

Here it seems that when a language of rights is used, the position of children becomes stronger: they are empowered and, for example, the inclusion of their perceptions and opinions is given emphasis, as is equal influence irrespective of gender.

In this brief analysis of the preschool curriculum, one more matter is worth mentioning. When the overall guidelines are formulated, the preschool teachers are to ensure that every child has a real say when it comes to “work methods and content” (Skolverket, 2018, p. 17). This could be

positively understood as pointing to important areas where children are to have influence, but it could also be understood as formulating where to draw the line where they are not to. In general, the Swedish curriculum for the preschool Lpfö 18 could be seen as ambitious in terms of its aim to educate preschool children to become citizens; however, as shown, the goals and guidelines are only partially in accordance with empowered inclusion, as it opens up space for teachers to judge children as not having ability enough.

Having presented the tensions between the various possibilities for empowered inclusion, we will now exemplify through research – both previous and current – different ways children are empowered and included – or not, as the case may be.

Children's Active Participation in Research as Informants

Although the CRC as early as 1989 emphasized young children's right to participate in issues that concern their lives, researchers have claimed that few studies facilitate their participation in ECE research on the subject of sustainability (Davis, 2009; Pramling Samuelsson & Williams, 2015). Researchers have argued that when children are considered active participants in their education and learning, they are also recognized as agents in their own lives (Berthelsen & Brownlee, 2005; Williams, Sheridan, & Pramling Samuelsson, 2018). In terms of children's participation in ECE research, Broström (2012, p. 5) emphasizes that "researchers have to consider thoroughly in what ways they can give the children a voice and the possibility of participating as active subjects in research." Studies that have included children's participation in research have employed different approaches (see Borg, 2017; Davis, 2005; Engdahl & Rabusicova, 2011; Mackey, 2012; Palmer et al., 1999). Below we give a few more detailed examples of such research projects.

In a European cross-cultural project on knowledge of distant environments, data were collected from children aged four and six in England (275 children), Slovenia (127 children), and Greece (125 children) (Palmer et al., 1999). To facilitate young children's participation in the studies, the project as a whole employed an autobiographical discussion approach. Each child was interviewed individually, and a series of photographs were used during the interviews. The results showed that young children are able to express their thoughts and ideas about environmental issues, such as the importance of the rain forests.

Another study was conducted in 28 countries, that involved 9,142 children aged two to eight to investigate their thoughts on and understanding of a picture of Earth and several children busily cleaning Earth with water (Engdahl & Rabusicova, 2011). The results showed that most of the

children understood the interdependence between people, and between nature and people. From this study, it was apparent that young children had knowledge about environmental issues, had ideas about what to do, and were able to create meaning about the relationship between human behavior and the environment. Consequently, given the opportunity to participate in research, children are competent enough to share their views and thoughts on matters that concern them (see also Sporre, 2021; Sporre et al., 2022).

A case study of a “whole-center” initiative in Australia reported how a kindergarten incorporated sustainability into its day-to-day curriculum practices in a slow process of change (Davis, 2005). An ethnographic inquiry was utilized, and approximately 63 children aged two and a half to about six participated each day. The results indicated that after being involved in a water conservation project, young children increased their knowledge about water issues, and their inquiries led to water conservation actions. In a shopping trolley project that focused on morality, children demonstrated how they could actively participate in social issues. The results also showed that if young children have the support and guidance of teachers (adults), they get involved in EfS and act both as decision-makers and as social and environmental activists.

In New Zealand, a participatory case study was carried out in an *enviroschool*, which is a preschool with an environmental profile, where teachers worked to empower children to explore ideas, make decisions, and take action within their community (Mackey, 2012). This study involved 30 children, three teachers, three parents, and one kindergarten manager over a period of six weeks. Information was collected by way of, for example, observations of the children and conversations with them. The findings indicated that by participating in the discussion about local and global issues, children became more aware of their surrounding environment and were able to participate in discussions in the kindergarten setting and at the dinner table at home. Results also showed that children demonstrated an ability to care about the environment and that they could work with democratic processes.

Examples of Two Research Projects in Sweden

A Swedish study, conducted by this chapter’s first author, investigated children’s knowledge and self-reported practices of sustainability (Borg, 2017). Borg operationalized the concept of sustainability into four themes – *Economic Equality*, *Resource Sharing*, *Recycling*, and *Transport Use* – using the three interlocking-circle model that includes environmental, social, and economic dimensions (Elliott, 2013). To facilitate children’s participation, the study was designed from a “child’s perspective,” meaning it was designed by adults so that children’s views and actions could be

understood. Using Bruner's (Bruner, 1961) *Iconic* (image based) modes of representation, Borg developed an age-appropriate interview instrument to interview 53 final-year preschool children from 12 preschools. To create a child-friendly, safe, and playful environment that would support children's participation in the study, Borg conducted interviews that involved the use of illustrations about each theme as well as a teddy bear, some toys, and a special sitting mat with a picture of two puppies. Borg then studied children's knowledge about recycling and their recycling practices.

The results indicated that by the time the children had completed their preschool education, many could describe the lives of other children in the world: for example, one child (#28) mentioned how many children are poor. According to the child, this is because their parents do not have a good education and therefore cannot get a good job to earn enough money (Borg, 2019b). In terms of the impact of various modes of transport on the environment and on the lives of animals and people, the results indicated that some children were able to share their views at a complex level: for example, some children talked about the harmful gases from cars and buses that cause air pollution and that result in the extinction of life and damage to Earth (see Borg, Winberg, & Vinterek, 2017). What this shows is that these children were aware of the interdependence of human beings, our activities, animals, nature, and eco-systems.

Ethical Consideration – An Example From a Current Randomized Study

A current project (The Swedish Research Council, Dnr. 2018-04445) led by first author Borg includes the study of the views children in their final year of preschool have on their opportunity to participate in and influence daily preschool activities that relate to sustainability. This randomized study includes 50 preschools from 25 municipalities of a total of 290 in Sweden. At the time of writing, about 400 preschool children have already been interviewed. In the interviews, a set of illustrations is used. An illustrator was asked to prepare illustrations that would be relevant to the research topics. As is customary, Borg pre-tested the illustrations and the interview questions on 14 children and then finalized the interview protocol for the main study. Informed consent to participate in the study was obtained from the children and their parents. Each child was asked in front of the preschool teacher about their willingness to participate immediately prior to the interview. Regardless of previous consent, their consent at that time was respected. Children were also asked if they wanted a teacher to stay with them during the interview, if they wanted to have their interview alone, or if they wanted another child to be with them at the interview. If the child's first language was not Swedish, then an interpreter was appointed to help with the language.

One of the questions directed at the children was whether they were being given any opportunity to decide anything at preschool that concerns their daily activities and if they had got the opportunity to decide something, what was it about. Another question was if they had the chance to decide on something for everyone in the world, all animals, and the environment, what would it be. The preliminary results show that most of the children felt that to some extent they are allowed to decide at preschool; however, they stated that this was limited to what they liked to play with: for example, they can decide whether to paint, draw, read a photo novella with a friend, or play on a tablet computer. Several children, however, did not think that they had any right to decide anything at preschool. Rather, they think it is the preschool teacher or the principal who decides everything. Most of the children expressed their keen interest in participating in decision-making activities. In one of the preschools, children reported that every week one child is appointed “Week Fixer” (Sw. *veckansfixare*) and thereby takes part in various activities with adults (teachers and child-carers). Some preschools that work explicitly with EfS have a Green Flag Council (*Grön flagga-råd*) for children where all children can meet once or twice each semester to discuss and plan what they would like to do and how they would like to do their activities. Similar types of practices have also been reported in earlier studies (e.g., see Borg, 2019a).

Challenges and Suggestions for Pedagogical Approaches

Above we have provided examples of studies where from a methodological point of view, children have been included as informed and respected individuals who share their knowledge and perspectives. These examples demonstrate moments of what could be understood as empowered inclusion, where children’s self-expressions are noted and given consideration, to later be communicated to practitioners and other researchers. Important to note is how EfS opens up for aspects of interdependency in various ways, such as the environmental, social, and economic dimensions of sustainability, and points to global realities with vulnerability as a condition by, for example, addressing poverty and injustices of various kinds concerning human beings, animals, nature, and eco-systems.

Yet the analysis of the curriculum for the preschool Lpfö 18, which here serves as an example of a current steering document, points to tensions within educational contexts where the rights of children can be compromised and their self-expressions not taken seriously (this despite the curriculum for preschool drawing largely on the CRC). To use the terminology of Wall (2019) then, the deep interdependence of children meaning that they can need adults to empower them is not realized, as their self-expressions are not taken seriously. The tentative results from the current Swedish study point in the direction of children being both listened

to and empowered, but this not being the case, for example, when they do not get the chance to participate in decision-making processes. The results also demonstrate that there are limits to what children can influence. This raises crucial questions in terms of the opportunities children to have to be citizens and to have democratic influence and the way their situation could be improved in these educational contexts.

First, there seems to be a *need to develop awareness* about children's empowered inclusion among preschool teachers – not least since children are bearers of norms and values that form future societies (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). Preschools must make children aware of their rights and of how they can be global democratic citizens. Therefore, children's active participation and global citizenship need to be prioritized in EfS; however, preschool teachers do not always recognize children as being active citizens with the ability to make positive changes within society (Ärlemalm-Hagsér, 2013).

Second, studies show that there is a *lack of teaching materials* for preschool teachers that can help them teach about and for sustainability (Borg, 2019a; Borg & Gericke, 2021). The newly revised curriculum for the preschool Lpfö18, as demonstrated above, requires that preschools provide children with the opportunity to understand sustainability from a holistic perspective, which means that all dimensions of sustainability – environmental, social, and economic – need to be included in teaching. As a result of a web-based survey on preschool teachers' needs relating to teaching material on sustainability, SNAE has, for example, decided to develop a podcast. Involved in this are researchers and preschool teachers with expertise in the field who aim to extend their understanding of the three dimensions of sustainability – environmental, social, and economic – from a holistic perspective. Because of requests from preschool teachers, the focus is on the social and economic dimensions. In this Swedish podcast, examples from current research and how preschool teachers work with sustainability are discussed (see Borg, Wiklund, Gjerstad, & Klarén, 2022). Additionally, there has been an increase in popular scientific publications in Swedish: for example, Pramling Samuelsson, Ärlemalm-Hagsér, Engdahl, Larsson, and Borg (2021) have published literature for in-service preschool teachers and students in preschool education titled *Förskolans arbete med hållbarhet [Sustainability in Preschool]*.

Third, studies have shown that *Teachers' Professional Development* (TPD) can have a positive impact on teachers' understanding of the complexity of EfS from a holistic perspective and that teachers can easily integrate EfS into their teaching while keeping with Agenda 2030 (Borg, 2019a; Borg & Gericke, 2021; Borg, Gericke, Höglund, & Bergman, 2012). To ensure that teachers have the necessary competence to perform their duties, it is important that they receive training in different issues. There are also teachers in higher education who lack proper training on

how to integrate EfS into their courses (see Davis & Davis, 2021; Deldén & Borg, 2021). Although policy supports the integration of sustainability, the implementation level of EfS in higher education programs can, as noted in these studies, be slow. To fully prepare future teachers with the knowledge, skills, and competence they need to work with sustainability, teacher education programs need to include courses in sustainability for students that focus on EfS and Agenda 2030, from basic to advanced levels. There is also a need for professional development training for university teachers so that they can increase their knowledge and competence in terms of teaching EfS. Studies indicate there is a positive relationship between children's learning for sustainability and their active participation in sustainability-related discussions and practices with teachers and parents (Borg, 2017; Grodzieska-Jurczak, Stepska, Nieszporek, & Bryda, 2006). Therefore, preschool teachers need to develop their skills and competence in EfS so that they feel comfortable working with sustainability issues. This is important because if preschool teachers do not recognize children as being active citizens with the ability to make positive changes within society, then it will be difficult to promote children's participation in preschool (Ärlemalm-Hagsér, 2013).

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have elaborated on the concepts of empowered inclusion (Josefsson & Wall, 2020) and deep interdependence (Wall, 2019), and used them in our analysis of EfS in an ECE context. The Swedish ECE curriculum has been our prime context for testing these concepts; however, both international and Swedish research has been used to illustrate ways and means to empower children. We conclude that the concepts Josefsson and Wall (2020) and Wall (2010, 2011, 2019) have developed can shed critical and constructive light on practices of ECE while pointing to the need for and importance of including children who, as citizens, have this right.

For Goal 16 of Agenda 2030 (United Nations, 2015) to be realized, we consider that institutional settings like ECE need to develop and adopt policies that ensure that children are given the opportunity to participate and influence. When adults in ECE respect the rights of children and recognize deep interdependence, they can contribute to children's empowered inclusion, which is a prerequisite for EfS and the achievement of Goal 4.7 of Agenda 2030.

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Notes

- 1 In this chapter, we used the terms *sustainability* and *education for sustainability* (EfS) except for in citations. For example, if the citation uses the term *sustainable development*, we retain it as it appears in the source text.
- 2 ECE in Sweden refers to education for children up to the age of six, which is the age they enter preschool class or primary school.

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