

Social and Emotional Challenges Encountered in the Beginning of School



Dimitrova, Tsvetelina



LAUREA UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

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Abstract

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Dimitrova Tsvetelina

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The topic of this Bachelor's thesis is Social and emotional challenges encountered in the beginning of school. The purpose is to present the social-emotional changes that accompany a significant period of an individual's life such as starting school. The aim of the Bachelor's thesis is to collect data that offers the children's own experiences on the topic.

The study is qualitative and the data gathering method chosen is interview guide approach, also known as the semi-structured interview method. The informants were first grade pupils from Kilonpuisto school in Espoo. In order to participate in the study, signed permissions from parents and oral permissions from the pupils themselves, the head master of the school, and the class teacher were obtained.

The findings of the Bachelor's thesis correspond to what has been discussed in the literature background section. Among the main results were changing relationships with others, such as peers and teachers, the importance of peer-relations, and building a new identity of a pupil in a new environment. The challenges the informants referred to could be gathered in the expressions being a pupil, school environment, friendships, teacher - pupil relationship, and teasing.

For the majority of informants starting school and being in school was entirely a positive and exciting experience. A few mentioned fear of the new place, people, and tasks. For some of the informants already existing friendships were crucial for overcoming the initial stress; for others it was the teacher and the activities that took place during the first few weeks.

Key words: normative age-graded influences, socio-emotional development, starting school

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1 Introduction

Human life is full of changes and challenges that individuals overcome in one way or another. These changes can concern only an individual or many people at the same time. In developmental psychology, these are referred to as non-normative and normative changes according to Baltes (Birch, 1997).

Childhood is considered one of the most influential periods in a person's life from the perspective of development. Many changes - both predictable and unpredictable - that happen between the ages of two and eleven, leave a considerable mark on the personality and character of an individual. These changes could be physical, psychological, cognitive, emotional or social. One such change is starting school.

Starting school can be a natural continuation of one's education or a completely new and different experience. Either way, it has a certain role in the process of forming a personality. In addition to that, the first years in school are also essential for viewing familiar concepts, like for example friendship, parents-child relationship, happiness and sadness, in a new way and with a deeper meaning. At the age of seven, when the school experience begins for the majority of children in Finland, the child is challenged to comprehend the surrounding environment in more abstract and independent way compared to previous years. Middle childhood (age six to eleven) establishes the grounds for the significant physical, psychological, and social changes that will take place during adolescence.

The purpose of this Bachelor's thesis is to study the emotional and social challenges that children encounter in the beginning of their school experience. The study will take place in Finland and the participants will be children from classes taught in English. Their nationality and cultural background will not be considered as influential for a number of reasons. First, the Bachelor's thesis does not want to give the impression that belonging to a particular group has an effect on the subject studied. Avoiding stereotyping is of a particular importance. Second, finding informants was a challenging task and for that reason no specific criteria were applied in the selection process. Last but not least, it can be argued that the participants already share a similar culture as they meet the criteria imposed by the school to be in that particular class. Knowledge in English was the only requirement for technical reasons. Previous studies on exactly this subject in Finland are not found. The Bachelor's thesis aims at presenting the children's point of view on going to school from emotional and social perspective. The findings can be useful in helping children manage the transition from preschool to school and minimize potential difficulties related to it. Studying the social and emotional challenges could also be useful on a more general level. For example, it can influence decisions about appropriate age of starting school or give more information on what subjects and

topics should be discussed during the first few months of school. The idea for the topic of the Bachelor's thesis is based primarily on the author's work experience in school, preschool, and kindergarten environments and the author's personal interest in the subject.

The Bachelor's thesis is part of the project Coping with crisis which belongs to the research and development policy of Laurea University of Applied Sciences. Just like any other R&D project, Coping with crisis gives an opportunity for working on developmental cases and problems in close cooperation with working life partners. As the name implies, the project is about dealing with critical events that characterize an individual's life. Some of the work partners of the project are Espoo mental health association, Lyömätön linja, Youth crisis center, Surunauha, Eating disorder center, Espoo shelters (www.laurea.fi).

Like any significant change in a person's life, starting school can be a stressful event. The findings of this Bachelor's thesis can be adapted to conduct further investigations and research the results of which might be beneficial in handling stressful experiences. Recognizing difficulties and taking actions to minimize their effect on the individual, might prevent future personal crisis and more complicated problems.

The results of the Bachelor's thesis could be useful in work life situations as they will give information on certain challenges from the children's own perspectives. By work here is meant any type of activities done with children aged six to eight. One important aspect in being employed in a job involving work with people is understanding one's clients and their needs. In addition to recognition, work with people also involves helping them to fulfill these needs. In this sense, educators and others involved in work with children, should have an understanding of the challenges their clients encounter. In reality, the social and emotional aspects of the children's lives are not always the primary concerns of the educator mostly because of lack of resources (such as time) and that allows many, on a first glance, insignificant problems to be left un-noticed.

2 Childhood and Personality Development

This section of the Bachelor's thesis presents the theoretical background of the work. It discusses the two main elements on which the work is based - childhood and personality development. Development and childhood are interlaced with each other. According to Smith and Cowie, development is the process by which "an organism (human or animal), grows and changes through its life-span" (1991, 5). The developmental processes are age related with infancy and childhood being the periods of the life-span where most changes take place. Following are presented the two elements (childhood and personality development) beginning with more general view on the two topics and narrowing down to the important for the study,

accordingly socio-emotional development and normative age-graded influences. Figure 1 presents the key elements of the study and the relationship between them.

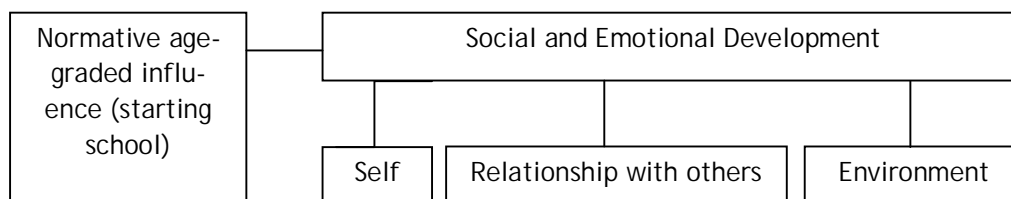


Figure 1: Relationship between terms

According to developmental psychology, childhood is the period of the human life where most changes occur. Even though influential and important changes take place throughout the whole life-span, the ones happening during childhood have the strongest effect (Berk, 2006).

Childhood begins at the age of two and lasts until the age of eleven. It consists of two major periods of human development - early childhood (two-six years) and middle childhood (six-eleven years). The two periods are characterized with significant changes in several aspects of development. According to Santrock, development is "the pattern of change that begins at conception and continues through the life-span" (1997, 15). This pattern of change is a result of biological/physical, cognitive, and socio-emotional processes. Biological processes refer to the changes in the physical characteristics of an individual. Gross and fine motor skills are part of the physical development. Cognitive processes stand for the changes that take place in thought, language, and intelligence of an individual. Cognitive changes include also creativity and the way of conducting interpersonal relationships. The last category - socio-emotional processes - describes changes in an individual's relationships with others, emotions, and personality. The three elements - biological, cognitive, and socio-emotional - have an influence on one another (Santrock, 1997).

Following is presented a general description of the physical and cognitive changes that take place during childhood. More detailed description is given for the socio-emotional changes as these are of particular interest for the Bachelor's thesis. The sources of theory presented here are publications of Berk (2006) and Santrock (1997).

2.1 Physical Development

During early childhood, physical development and movements improve gradually contributing to higher levels of independence when performing simple everyday tasks. This is the period of life during which children are most active.

During middle childhood, growth is expressed in slow gains of weight and height. Important changes occur in the skeletal and muscular systems. Typical for the gross motor development of that age is the improvement of flexibility, balance, agility, and force. Compared to early childhood, jumping, running, hopping, and ball skills are more precise and motor skills in general characterize with more smoothness and coordination. (Berk 2006, Santrock 1997)

2.2 Cognitive Development

Like physical development, cognitive and language development is subject to rapid changes during early childhood. Imagination, attention, and short-term memory improve significantly. Counting and language develop with the help of grammar rules as sophisticated expressions become more frequent.

Middle childhood is characterized with mastering the basic skills of writing, reading, and arithmetic. Significant improvement is noticed in memory, scientific thinking, attention, and concentration. Thinking becomes more logical, organized, and flexible than before; abstract thinking occurs but it requires direct perception of concrete information. Attention is more selective and adaptable. Vocabulary increases rapidly and grammar advances as a result of improvement in logical reasoning and analytical skills, which contributes to improvement in language awareness in general. Children's perception of language and words changes by becoming more analytical and abstract. (Berk 2006, Santrock 1997)

2.3 Socio-emotional Development

Children start developing their concept of self and self-esteem during early childhood. During this period, some of the significant changes that take place are the realization of gender and understanding basic emotions in self and others. Play has a crucial role in growing up and first friendships form during this period.

During middle childhood, children's interaction with the world and culture increases, as well as self-control and the importance of achievement. Important changes occur in the concept

of self due to more intense interaction with others and larger exposure to the outside world. Self-esteem becomes more realistic. The influence of others on shaping personality increases as a result of peer interactions. The notion of different perspectives and interpretations of others' emotions are some of the essential changes that characterize middle childhood. Responsibility and independence increase.

In order to understand better the topic researched in this Bachelor's thesis, it is essential to clarify the use of the words "social" and "emotional" in this text. To begin with, emotions and social behavior go hand in hand and influence each other. Often in the text, social and emotional are replaced by the term socio-emotional. According to Gerrod Parrott, emotions communicate one's perceptions and intentions to others and "they can be contagious" (2001, 2). Emotions are highly subjective "responses to events that are important to the individual" (Gerrod Parrott, 2001, 59) and those responses often involve or reflect on others. They are closely connected with physical, mental, and behavioral symptoms that appear within an individual. It is considered by some researchers that there is a set of inborn basic emotions but what emotions are included in this set is unclear (Gerrod Parrott, 2001).

In the process of growing up, a child's self, relationships with others, and interaction with environment are subjects to changes that require coping and adjusting. These three elements are of a particular interest for the Bachelor's thesis and for that reason will be explained more thoroughly.

It is important to mention in advance that socio-emotional changes in the text do not refer to behavior disorders. Even though, the expression can be seen as synonymous of behavior and emotional disorders, its meaning in this Bachelor's thesis lacks the clinical background. The emotional and social challenges as seen here can be related in a non-clinical way to adjustment disorders. According to Kranner (Rutherford Jr. et al, 2004), adjustment disorders could be experienced by children in a time of change where stressful events prevent coping with the situation. The symptoms of the inability to cope should appear within three months of the stressful event and should last no more than six months after this event has occurred. There are various expressions of the adjustment disorder including atypical social and school performances. Kranner's words add up to Baltes' theory concerning normative age-graded changes. Both theories state that the change involves certain level of adjustment to a new situation that may cause emotional and social disturbances. If such disturbances are neglected, they might grow up into problems which might escalate to disorders. Social and emotional well-being is crucial for the mental health of the individual at any stage of life but especially during childhood as it is the time of learning how to deal with challenges.

One of the important lessons that need to be learned during childhood is learning to deal with oneself and with others on physical and psychological level. Children adapt strategies to deal with their own feelings and emotions in addition to anticipating to others' reactions. Interact-

ing with self and others involves overcoming a considerable amount of social and emotional challenges. It is considered by some psychologists that children are predominantly egocentric, meaning not able to see the world from others' perspectives. Through their interaction with the others and environment, children begin slowly to form concepts about themselves, to develop self-awareness and self-esteem. Throughout childhood they learn when it is appropriate to show what emotions and to what extent. Also they learn to recognize emotions in others and the appropriate reactions to these. As Woodhead, Barnes, Miell, Oates state, controlling emotions "isn't just a process of maturation, It is a product of socialization." (1995, 169). As it is mentioned above, the nature of emotion is questionable of being only biological or only cultural. It is fair to assume that both have an impact on person's reactions. In elementary school, self understanding advances and moral and gender perceptions change. Social comparisons are the main sources of information for defining oneself. Understanding self and others is also done through moral development. In general, middle childhood is the period through which the child begins to see social rules in a more flexible way. Things are not seen as only wrong or right and deeper social consequences are considered.

Relationships with others can be also explained with the individual's attachment to significant figures with whom the individual interacts. According to Smith and Cowie, attachments in early relationships are influential in later ones. One theory is that the child builds "an internal working model" with different attachment figures based on previous interactions and affective experiences characteristic for that particular relationship. The internal working models can be updated or developed with time with or without the need of a physical interaction. Usually the physical aspect is needed for little children or individuals who have not reached the stage of operational thinking. With age, physical interaction is not needed (Smith and Cowie, 1991, 68). Some of the most prominent figures in emotional and social aspect for a child in elementary school are parents, peers, and teachers.

The relationship parents - children at that time has become less intensive compared to early ages but it still holds an important meaning. Children are given more independence and tasks and the question about rewarding is re-considered. The parents, on the other side, become less important in providing an exact daily program for their child. Reasoning in the relationship increases and becomes more effective than in early childhood but remains moderate compared to adolescence.

Relationship with peers gains extreme importance and meaning. With age, the amount of friendships increases. By "peer" is understood "someone who is about the same age ... usually someone in the same year, class, or age grade" (Smith and Cowie, 1991, 94). Peers are usually on the same stage of cognitive development. Friendships are important aspect of a child's world and a major factor for the present and future well-being of a child. Friendship is a social interaction that, according to Gottman and Parker (1987), has six functions: compan-

ionship, stimulation, physical support, ego support, social comparison, and intimacy/affection (Santrock, 1997). It is important to note that a child might have multiple relationships with peers but might still not have friends. Friendship stands for "close association between two particular people, as indicated by their association together or their psychological attachment and trust" (Smith and Cowie, 1991, 97). According to Sullivan (quoted in Smith and Cowie, 1991) friendship and peer relations are important for a child aged four to nine as the child seeks establishing and maintaining his or her own status and popularity. In other words, it is essential "to gain personal prestige" in the eyes of one's peers (Smith and Cowie, 1991, 97). Different sources support the idea that friendship is important for social development at any stage of childhood (Smith and Cowie, 91, 102).

Teachers have important role in establishing rules, group processes, and authority in environments children spend considerable time of their lives (Santrock, 1997, 422). It is considered that the child - teacher relationship is working in both ways meaning that the two sides influence each other. A teacher is a crucial figure in one's life in a long term not only in academic but also in personal aspect.

As the Bachelor's thesis is about investigating the challenges children encounter in the beginning of school life, here by environment is meant the school. As any new environment, it requires re-shaping personality and offers new ideas and possibilities for development. Adjusting to a new environment means adapting to new standards of self-judgment and of interacting with new significant others as well as adapting to new reference groups. The process of moving from one environment into another is known as transition. Transition is usually characterized with leaving something constructed in previous environment behind and learning a new set of values and ways of constructing meaning about important things in the new environment. In a sense, the transition is seen as a cultural shock that challenges the children's present identity. The new environment has its own culture, physical place, people, roles, and rules in both formal and informal aspects. Transition involves changes on personal, interactive, and contextual level (Dunlop, Fabian, 2007). It is important to mention that each child's experience of the transition to school is a unique experience and is influenced to some degree of the child's social background.

2.4 Theories on Personality Development

The following section presents basic information on different theories on personality development. Following more detailed description of Paul Baltes' theory on different influences is presented. In the end, previous researches related to the studied subject are discussed. The idea is to create a general picture about the factors influencing personality development and

consecutively to narrow down the subject to the important for the Bachelor's thesis normative change of starting school.

In developmental psychology there are different theories explaining how children grow up to be the adults they are. Some authors support the idea that environment is the main influence on person's socio-emotional development while others imply that the reasons behind certain behavior are inborn. This is also known as the nurture versus nature conflict. Below are presented some of the most prominent theories on development.

Freud and Erikson, defenders of the psychoanalytic perspective, claim that personality and development are strongly influenced by the way an individual manages the conflicts between biological drives and social expectations which occur throughout the life-span.

The behaviorism and social learning theory, represented by Skinner, Pavlov, and Bandura, supports the notion that external and reinforcement provoking factors are crucial for the development of personality. According to social learning theory, personality shaping is simply modeling or imitating, also known as observational learning.

The theory described by Piaget about cognitive development, naturally sees learning as the primary tool for forming personality. He came up with four stages based on biological influences. These four stages are sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational, and formal operational.

Another theory that views the external environment as significant is Vygotski's Sociocultural theory. According to it, the focus is on the cultural context consisting of values, beliefs, customs, and skills.

A theory that gathers together both internal and external influences is the ecological system theory of Bronfenbrenner. In shaping personality, the system has an important role through its multiple levels or the micro-, macro-, exo-, and chronosystems. (Berk 2006, Santrock 1997)

As the subject of the Bachelor's thesis concerns particular event in life, special attention is paid to normative changes described by Baltes. The role of the above mentioned theories is to give another view on the subject. The following section discusses in details Baltes theory and explains its significance to the Bachelor's thesis.

2.5 Baltes' Theory

According to Baltes (Smith, Cowie, 1991, 6), development is not the only reason for changes in behavior. He points out that "age-related trends" are only one of the three major influ-

ences on development and personality shaping. The three influences Baltes talks about are normative age-graded, normative history-graded, and non-normative life events. According to Smith and Cowie (1991), they are influenced by biological and environmental factors the impact of which varies in different cases.

Normative age-graded influences are the ones particularly related to chronological age, for example starting school. Normative history-graded influences are those happening during a certain period of time and having effect on people's life in a particular way. As discussed by Smith and Cowie (1991, 6), normative history-graded influences are the ones "associated with historical time for most members of a given generation". An example of a history-graded influence is a war. Non-normative influences are life events that characterize only an individual's life, that "do not occur in any normative age-graded or history-graded manner for most individuals" (Smith, Cowie, 1991, 6). An example of non-normative influence is a loss of a parent or close friend. Baltes claims that the effect of these life events depends on biological and environmental factors, as much as on the individual's social relationships. During school life the environmental, biological, and social factors have a strong influence on the individual and undergo through significant changes. For example, attachment changes its understanding from closeness (for a younger child) to approval and affection (for a school-age child). As it can be noticed, things acquire more abstract meaning with age. The interaction of the child with others and the environment in which the child is growing up, have important role in shaping the personality, cognition, language, emotions, and social behavior of the individual.

2.6 Previous Studies on Normative Age-graded Influences

For the purpose of the study, the particular normative age-graded event investigated is starting school. Starting school happens for approximately everybody around the age of seven, which age belongs to the middle childhood. As it has been discussed already above, typical for that period are changes in "logic through process; basic literacy skills; understanding of self, morality, and friendship; and peer-group membership" (Berk, 2006, 8).

Not a great deal of previous research on the topic social and emotional challenges when starting school in Finland was found. Following are discussed similar to the topic studies from around the world.

Certain amount of studies on transition to school has been discovered from various international sources. Researches on the subject show that starting school can be "challenging if not traumatic for some children and especially for children with less-than-optimal circumstances" (Dunlop, Fabian, 2007, 62). Changing preschool for school is crucial period in one's life that can have important consequences on one's well-being and future school experience. Accord-

ing to research, conducted by Kagan and Nevman (1998) and Margets (2002) as well as others, “children who have difficult time adjusting to school from the beginning, and who experience social, behavioral or academic difficulties in the early years of schooling are more likely to continue experiencing these problems throughout their schooling” (Dunlop, Fabian, 2007, 75).

In 2003 the Australian Scholarships Group commissioned Students Social and Emotional Health Report. The participants were students from early childhood programs, primary and secondary school and teachers from all over Australia. The research was conducted through survey instruments designed by Professor Michael E. Bernard. The main purpose of the report was to contribute to supporting children’s education. Some of the results were:

- The percentage of students with higher levels of social and emotional well-being does not increase with age/school years.
- Students with lower levels of social and emotional well-being are likely to experience many negative and a few positive emotions and behaviors, and are likely to demonstrate few social and emotional capabilities.
- Teacher and students views on the students’ social and emotional characteristics differ.
- Social and emotional competence of students is very important contributor to students’ social and emotional well-being. Students with higher levels of social and emotional well-being show well developed social and emotional capabilities in three domains: resilience, positive social orientation, and positive work orientation. Students with lower levels of social and emotional well-being show delays in the three domains.
- Parents’ as well as teachers’ actions are important contributors to the social and emotional well-being of the students. (<http://www.asg.com.au/social-emotional>)

Another relevant research from UK concerning the transition to school, and particularly the social and emotional aspects, is done by Dr Hilary Fabian. The report discusses the importance of key figures (parents, teachers) in coping and adjusting to the change of going to school and the importance of social and emotional well-being for academic success. The main findings are that in order to be successful transition to school requires a cooperation among the parties involved (parents, students, and teachers). Influential for the transition according to the author, are the environment, the culture, the socio-emotional experience, and the ability to cope with changes.

(<http://extranet.edfac.unimelb.edu.au/LED/tec/pdf/fabian1.pdf>)

The current researches of Professor Stig Broström from the Danish University of Education, could be considered relevant to the subject of the Bachelor's thesis. Broström's work pays significant attention on the transition from kindergarten to school and on children's expectations about school. Topics such as play and toys, communication among interested parties, problems related to transition, etc. are studied in depth.

(http://extranet.edfac.unimelb.edu.au/LED/tec/prof_sb.shtml).

In "Early childhood education in five Nordic countries" (Broström, Wagner, 2003), in the article for Finland, is mentioned a research by Laine from 2002 on the topic "Origins of exclusion in early childhood". Unfortunately, the research itself or more information about it in English was not found.

3 Research Methods and Description of the Implementation Stage

3.1 Qualitative Research

The Bachelor's thesis is research-oriented and the research methods used are qualitative. After further investigation concerning the most appropriate and effective way of collecting data, it is considered that using an interviewing method will provide more information than observation. In addition, interviewing is more time efficient for both work partners and the author. As Patton states (2002, 14), qualitative methods give more "depth, openness, and detail" to a research. Also, qualitative methods give an opportunity to see the research question from the perspective of the interviewees (in this case the children) without intentionally shaping the perspective through predefined categories and subjectivity. Important thing to be aware of when it comes to qualitative research is that the respondents may not be able to answer the questions in depth because of technical reasons (e.g. language used). However, Patton states that even "elementary level of inquiry" is beneficial. Another potential disadvantage of the qualitative research is making generalizations in analyzing the data collected. The interviewer should be particularly aware of this point as qualitative data does not allow generalization.

In choosing the methods of research, answers for the following questions are looked for:

What is the purpose of the inquiry?

Who is the primary audience for the findings?

What questions will guide the inquiry?

What data will answer or illuminate the inquiry questions?

What resources are available to support the inquiry?

What criteria will be used to judge the quality of the findings? (Patton, 2002)

The interview consists of a number of open ended questions that relate to particular aspects of development (emotional and social). The questions are composed in a way that is easy to comprehend and provoke honest and thorough answers. In constructing the interview questions, an important point to be considered is that they should not be too specific, supporting particular answers but more like caring a theme. The interviews are audio recorded and consequently transcribed. Notes are taken, when needed, during and after each interview. The interviews are conducted in English. Prior to the interviews, a visit to the class is organized to get acquainted with the children and the environment. Also an interview with the class teacher is conducted, to obtain informative perspective of the studied problem (See Appendices).

3.2 Content Analysis

An important question to be considered after collecting the data is how to analyze it. In the preliminary plan of this Bachelor's thesis it was mentioned that case study approach will be used to analyze the data. However, after the actual interviews took place, it was decided that a better approach will be content analysis.

Content analysis is used "to analyze the content of documents" (Denscombe 2003, 221) by assuming that the words or phrases mentioned most often stand for what is important for the study. In analyzing the raw data a number of steps were followed, as suggested by Denscombe (2003). First, an appropriate sample of text was chosen. In this case, as the amount of data obtained from most informants was limited, each interview is a sample. Second, the text was broken down to smaller units - original expressions. Third, an idea what the researcher is looking for was presented through key phrases (simplified meaning) associated with the interview themes. The researcher should be aware of how the informants express these ideas. In the current study, the themes are expectations about school before starting, experience and difficulties in the beginning; relationships with friends, family, and teachers; comparison between school and preschool, likes and dislikes regarding school. These expressions are related to the three main themes of the interview - self, relationships, and environment. The next step of the data analysis is to relate the units with the categories, meaning that key phrases should be attached to the corresponding themes or subcategories. Steps five and six consist of analyzing the frequency and relation among the units throughout the interviews.

3.3 Data Collection

The interview is built around three major themes, as it can be seen from Appendix 1. These themes are:

- self: the informant's personal experience of being a first grader; difficulties and expectations related to that experience;
- relationship with others: the informant's opinions on their relationships with teachers, family, and peers; possible changes and challenges in interacting with others;
- environment: the informant's impressions of the environment (both physical and psychological); comparisons to familiar environments and feelings towards the school one;

The objective is to give a three-level perspective on the informants' perception of being in first grade. As it can be seen it combines personal, social and environmental aspects which are believed to be some of the essential influences on a forming personality based on various psychological researches. The questions are designed so that they will give an inside view on the informants' experiences of starting school.

In addition to the pupils' interviews, an interview was conducted with the teacher for the purpose of receiving her professional opinion on starting school and the support school offers for the social and emotional challenges experienced in first grade.

The method used for conducting the study is an interview guide approach in order to allow the informants more freedom in expression and feeling of easiness. Before explaining more about the interviewing approach chosen in this Bachelor's thesis, it is important to mention that interviewing in general is an investigating approach that allows the researcher to see the world through the informant's perspective. According to Patton, qualitative interviews give the impression that "the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit" (2002, 341). Qualitative interviewing gives the opportunity to the informants to "express their own understandings in their own terms" in a framework established in advance (Patton, 2002, 348).

Qualitative data can be obtained through three interviewing approaches:

- informal conversational interview;
- general interview guide approach;
- standard open-ended interview;

These three have their positive and negative sides and serve for achieving concrete purposes. The informal conversational interview uses on the spot technique of forming questions during the process of interaction between interviewer and informant. The general interview guide approach (used in the Bachelor's thesis) starts the interviewing process with a set of predefined issues to be explored throughout each interview. These issues are the same for each informant but the order in which they are investigated or the particular words used in constructing the interview questions vary from informant to informant. The last approach, the standard open-ended interview, as the name suggests, follows a strict pattern of question order and usage of words. The purpose is to conduct all the interviews in a very similar fashion. (Patton, 2002, 342)

As it can be seen from the above short descriptions of the three interview approaches, the most suitable one in this case is the interview guide approach. It gives freedom to the interviewer to explore issues that come up in each interview while still keeps the interview into the limits of what is essential according to the predefined topics. As Patton explains it, the approach gives the possibility to the researcher to "explore, probe, and ask questions that will elucidate and illuminate" the particular subject (2002, 343). In other words, the interviewer has the freedom to conduct a spontaneous but still focused on a particular, predetermined, area conversation. It is not expected for the interview to include topics not discussed in the framework but in case such topics arise, they would be considered with the particular informant and not necessarily with the rest. The main advantage of the interview guide approach is time efficiency. As Patton points out, "the guide helps make interviewing a number of different people more systematic and comprehensive by delimiting in advance the issues to be explored" (2002, 343). This interview guide approach is also known as a semi-structured interview in other literature sources (Denscombe, 2003).

3.4 Research Question and Objectives

The research question investigated by the Bachelor's thesis is how children experience the beginning of school. The main purpose of the inquiry is to contribute to knowledge. The primary audience is anyone interested in changes that take place in childhood and anyone working with children age six to eleven. The results should be suitable as a source of information on challenges children experience with the beginning of school. In addition to that, the results should give grounds for further research on emotional and social challenges experienced by children in periods of change in general.

To answer the research question, a number of helping questions investigating the challenges, requiring effort to cope with, will be used. These challenges are related to the already men-

tioned in the literature background section of this Bachelor's work concepts of self, relationships with others, and environment.

The first helping question is what challenges children face in first grade. Starting school marks the beginning of a new period in a person's life and it occurs at the same time when major physical and psychological changes take place, as suggested by developmental psychology. Changes often bring new challenges that require from the individual the learning of new strategies of coping. By challenges here is meant new situations the individual finds him-/herself in, new interactions, feelings, etc. In other words, the challenges are the different things the individual encounters in the process of building personality.

The second helping question is what children see different in themselves compared to before starting school. The goal of this question is to acquire information about the socio-emotional development of the clients according to their own words. Even though this task sounds challenging, it is worth giving the chance to the clients to speak about themselves.

The next helping question is how children's relationships with significant others have evolved during the first months in school. By significant others here are meant family members, teachers, and peers. The research is interested in the new aspects and changes that might have influenced the individual's relationships and their influence on the individual during the period of change.

The last helping question to be considered concerns the environment the children find themselves in with the beginning of school. It is of particular interest what influence the environment has on the self and the relationships with others. By environment here is meant both the physical and psychological aspects of school.

To clarify what has been said above, Figure 2 will show the connection between the research question and the helping questions.

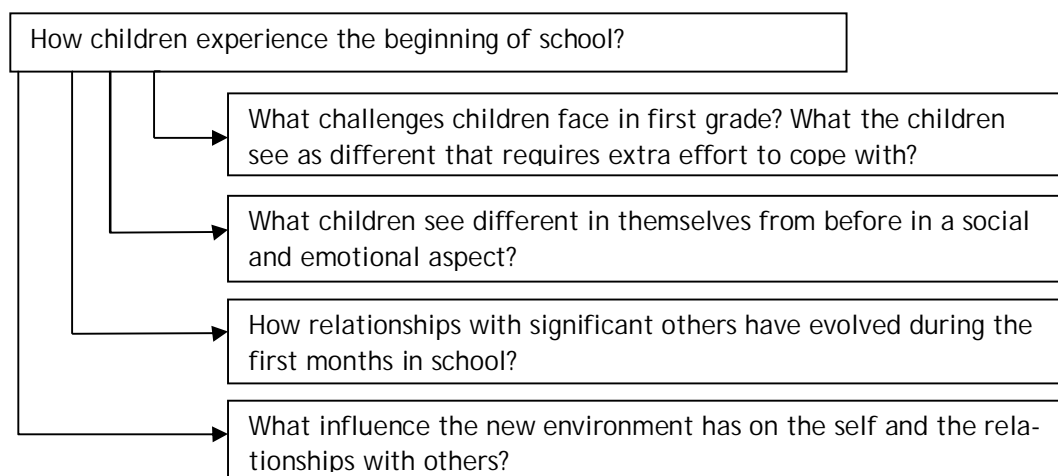


Figure 2: Main research question and additional clarifying questions

The purpose of the Bachelor's thesis is to provide basic information on the subject from children's perspective and also to provide initial information that can be used in further research of this or similar topics. The Bachelor's thesis is based on theoretical notions (Baltes' normative changes and socio-emotional development) and the purpose is to give a perspective on a certain normative change and the possible problems that might accompany that change.

3.5 Informants

The criteria based on which the informants for this Bachelor's thesis were selected refer to the informants' age (not older than seven), informants' school experience (first graders), informants' previous educational experience (preschool background), informants' language skills (able to express themselves in English). No requirements were posed concerning the informants' gender or nationality. In meeting the above mentioned, only the criterion of language skills was somewhat of a challenge. During the interviews, it was discovered that, the level of English is not the same for all the informants and sometimes Finnish and English language were used. The informants were offered the possibility to answer in Finnish, if they were having troubles finding the words in English. There were also a few cases where the informants gave limited information to the asked questions.

All of the informants had the experience of being in a preschool as it is an obligatory requirement in Finland. The informants were not explicitly asked about their nationality but based on observation, it can be said that some were Finnish and others were with foreign or mixed origin. Despite that, all of them seemed fluent in Finnish in addition to the varying levels of English. During the observation and interviews, it was also noticed that the informants were very different from each other in sense of concentration, interest, approach, etc. It is also important to mention that four of the informants and the interviewer knew each other from before.

Six of the informants were boys and five were girls. The total number of participants was eleven students. Both theirs and their guardians' approval to participate in the research was obtained prior to conducting the interviews. The informants and their guardians were contacted through the class teacher and the needed written and verbal permissions were obtained. Appendix 3 shows the letter presented to the guardians stating the purpose of the research, when and how it will take place, and interviewer's contact information. The letters to the guardians were distributed in the middle of December 2008. The guardians were asked to sign their agreement and to return the consent form to the class teacher by the end of December 2008. Also in December verbal permissions from the head master of the school and the class teacher to perform the research were received. A permission from Espoo board of

Education is not obtained as it was not needed. On the days of the interviews, the informants were asked if they agree to participate and if the interviews can be audio recorded.

3.6 Description of the Implementation Phase

The implementation phase explains the conduct of the interviews. All took place in Kilonpuisto school during the first school week of January 2009 (Week 2). A short observation was done along with the interviews, including both lessons and other activities, for the purpose of giving an overall impression of the informants, as well as familiarizing informants and interviewer. The interviews were conducted in two consecutive days.

Kilonpuisto school is a comprehensive school situated in Espoo. It offers preschool, primary school, secondary school, and special education classes. The school has both one language and bilingual classes. In the bilingual classes, teaching is done entirely in English in primary school; while in lower secondary school, 60% of the subjects are taught in English. The policy of the school is to encourage self-esteem, appreciation of life, tolerance and respect for those who are different. A number of optional studies are offered to allow the pupils to develop their individual strengths and abilities. (www.espoo.fi)

Considering the needs of the research and the possibilities provided by the school, it was agreed with the class teacher that the first week of January is the best time for performing the tasks. The first days after a holiday were considered more likely to cause feelings similar to ones of starting school even if with lesser power. Having the interviews during that first school week also did not disturb very much the class activities.

The interviews took place during school hours in the school hall or in the afternoon club facility depending on availability. The location allowed familiarity of the place for the informants, enough privacy, and possibility for recording. The total amount of interviews was twelve (eleven students and a teacher) and equaled approximately one hour and forty minutes audio recording and thirty seven pages of transcription, font and size of letters according to Laurea thesis guidelines. During the interviewing process, the interview themes were followed in the majority of cases but also enough freedom was allowed for the informants to express their thoughts.

In the beginning of each interview the informants were asked if they would like to draw while talking. The informants were asked if they are alright with having the interviews audio recorded. The questions asked were the same in general. However the order in which asked or the words used varied among informants. As some of the questions were troublesome for the informants to understand and answer, additional questions were asked, often these being

close-ended ones. In order to minimize the effect of the close-ended questions, efforts were made by the interviewer to present them as examples rather than asking for yes/no answer.

After the interviews were concluded, summaries for each interview, including paraphrasing of the most often encountered answers and notes on the behavior and attitude of the informant during the interview, were made. During this stage and the stage of describing the findings, a care is taken to present the original thoughts of the informants while keeping their anonymity. The researcher's own opinions and views were left for the Discussion section of the Bachelor's thesis.

During this stage of coding the data into sections and subsections, each informant is given a number from one to eleven for identification. In order to facilitate the handling of data and to simplify the correction of possible errors, the original order of interviewing the informants corresponds to their identification number. At the time the data results are reported, in order to protect anonymity, the identification number is changed and no longer corresponds to the order in which the interviews were conducted. The last identification numbering is done randomly.

To make the process of data analyses more comprehensive, two Tables will be presented as follows. Table 1 shows the relation between sub- and main categories. The process of handling of the data obtained from the interviews is shown through an example in Table 2.

Subcategories	Main Categories	
Expectations	Self	Challenges encountered in the beginning of school
Experience		
Difficulties		
Family	Relationships with Others	
Friends		
Teachers		
School vs. Playschool	Environment	
Likes		
Dislikes		

Table 1: Subcategories and Main Categories

Table 1 presents an example of how data analysis was done:

Original Expression	Simplified Meaning	Subcategories	Main Category
"I want to go to school."; "It's fun that I get to school and ... I get new friends and play."; "I was thinking that is there gonna be like those kind of kids who hit or nice... I was thinking what are gonna do there... I was also excited quite much."	Excitement about the change; interest in the unknown;	Expectations	Self
"Fun and I ... I got friends"; "Tule ... vähän pelkäsin."; "I remember it was really fun to be with Pirjo and do funny things."; "... it was a little bit scary to meet new people... "; "... me oltiin tosi ilosii. Me kaikki päästii samalle luokalle."; "I can understand everything quite well and there's quite nice friends and it's really nice to be first grader."	Positive experience; fear of the new place;	Experiences	
"To remember the homeworks and ... what we did get for homework."; "How could there be so much students."; "The most difficult was when my mommy didn't come with me (in the class room)"	Efforts to adjust to the new situation	Difficulties	

Table 1: Handling of data and formation of categories

4 Findings

The main findings of the Bachelor's thesis show what has been already suggested by theoretical sources in the theoretical background section. The main findings are presented as follows with the help of quotations. In quoting the informants' words, * sign is used to replace names or other information that might be crucial for recognizing the informant. In brackets are mentioned the interviewer's clarifying words that are needed in some quotes.

4.1 Self

Being in the first grade appeared to be a positive experience for the informants. The most important things pointed out were having fun and making new friendships, in addition to acquiring new knowledge.

When asked about what were their thoughts before starting school, the informants had troubles recollecting. However, based on the few responses obtained, it appeared that the mood was one of excitement and curiosity:

“Like really excited and then like, oh, I don’t wanna go if it’s the first day ... Because I’m so excited if it’s a new place and I don’t know where is my classroom and that kind of stuff...”

“I was thinking that is there gonna be like those kind of kids who hit or nice or ... I was thinking that what are we gonna do there because ... I was also excited quite much.” (Informant 6)

The majority of informants experienced the beginning of school as something exciting and fun. However, some of them felt scared and anxious in the beginning:

“... it is very fun.” (Informant 9)

“ ... there is fun and I get much friends.

We get to know different things every day.” (Informant 4)

“ ... it’s fun that I get to school and ... I get new friends and play ... ” (Informant 10)

“... it was a little bit scary to meet new people ... because I didn’t know them.” (Informant 9)

“The most difficult ... was when my mommy didn’t come with me (to the classroom the first day)” (Informant 6).

The difficulties the informants experienced in the beginning were mainly related to school subjects and getting used to new routines:

"To remember the homeworks and ... what we did get for homework because they are ... sometimes so hard that I don't want to do that and then I forgot."
(Informant 1)

"And then preschool ... it doesn't really matter if I'm late but here at school it much matters ..." (Informant 6)

"... that we have to wake up early and then we have to ... then we have to go dress fast." (Informant 9)

According to the teacher, the first few weeks were important for the social and emotional being of the informants:

"... all the classes were with one teacher, with their own teacher, for the first week ... It was kind of a soft beginning and we did some kind of arts and crafts and getting to know each other and a lot of talking and that kind of stuff."
(Teacher)

4.2 Relationships with Others

When it comes to relationships with others, the informants talked the most about friends. Finding new friends was seen as an easy task. The amount of friends and the character of friendships varied among the informants. Keeping old friendships proved to be a bit of a challenge when everyday interaction was not provided:

"... little bit easy (to make new friends). Like it was also kiiva kun saa uusin kaverin." (Informant 11)

"Well, I have one friend ... that was in a päiväkoti now we're in the same school. And I did make a new friend ..." (Informant 8)

"Because there was one ... one was the same * as me ... *** and we were really good friends in the beginning. We did think that we will be good friends then."
(Informant 4)

"We don't usually do so much but we see sometimes because ... hm ... because we see sometimes in the shop or somewhere." (Informant 4)

The relationships with teachers were also mentioned as having undergone a significant change. The majority of informants found the teachers in school different compared to the teachers in preschool based on the teachers' attitudes:

"... (teacher) is like little bit angry like us like in preschool." (Informant 11)

"... now you forgot one book at home and then they are really like angry at me. So I don't like that ... so I like it that I have everything with me so they are not angry." (Informant 6)

"Uh...that we are afraid that we get ... uh ... that teacher is going to shout ... " (Informant 4)

The questions referring to relationships with family members were often misunderstood by the informants and, as a result, no adequate information was obtained.

The teacher's opinion on starting school was that it is a significant moment in a child's life:

"... it's much more strict and you have to be quiet here and you have to sit and stay at your seat. It's not so free than in preschool but otherwise they learn so much in the preschool already. (Teacher)

4.3 School Environment

The new environment was seen as challenging previously constructed roles and schemes. When asked to compare school with preschool, the informants pointed out the differences between the two in terms of physical, academic, and social aspects:

"School is not like ... a little bit ... like erilainen ... kun toi tarha ...

... Here is coming like the läksyt." (Informant 5)

"How there could be so much students.

And then when we go to eat, we ... it's so big lunch room." (Informant 4)

"...in the school there is lots more people like in our class is a little bit more less people in the ... like ... in the play school ... whole playschool there's little bit more people than in the class." (Informant 9)

"... at home ... there we can play and school ... and school we can always like ... uh ... always ... hm ... talking." (Informant 10)

"... because at day-care, day-care there was like all the time like can play but here it's not like all the time all the time you need to play." (Informant 1)

"...here we cannot like take school some toys and play with toys." (Informant 11)

The positive sides of being in school seemed to gravitate around school subjects, breaks/free time activities, and friends:

"... we can do more things and that I know some more." (Informant 1)

"I like to read and I like the Maths." (Informant 8)

The difficulties related to starting school were understood mainly in academic terms. However, the most often mentioned dislike was teasing:

"When somebody's teasing." (Informant 1)

"Um...that...somebody tease me..." (Informant 10)

"Like when somebody ... jos joku kiusaa koko ajan ja seuraan.

... there is ulkovalvoja ... we're going to like ... to speak ... nii niille et nii silleee et ne ettii sen, joka on kiusannu ja sitte puhuu sen kans." (Informant 5)

"... I go and tell a teacher and then the guy who teases me, or if it's a girl then, then they just say sorry and then it's ok." (Informant 6)

The teacher was asked how difficult situations and problems were managed in the beginning considering the limited amount of time and resources teachers are usually given:

"... they know they can come here and talk to me. I have twenty three of them so I just don't have enough of me to give a little bit to everybody every day. So it's easier if they contact me or their parents contact me and of course then I help and then I talk." (Teacher)

5 Discussion

5.1 Summary and Assessment of Findings

According to the findings of this Bachelor's thesis, it could be said that the main challenges encountered in the beginning of school are adapting to the new role of a pupil and to the new school environment and reshaping relationships with peers and teachers. Based on the information acquired from both pupils and teacher, children experience the beginning of school as a significant event in their lives which requires changes in daily routines, in relationship with old and new friends, in growing more independent and managing on one's own.

Being a pupil was experienced to be desired and liked despite everything. The school environment in physical and social terms had a strong influence on the informants. Despite the challenges and demands coming from being a first grader, almost all informants expressed satisfaction in being in school. School was seen as something important and different that requires adjustments in one's life and behavior, such as increased independence, higher level of concentration and discipline. School was preferred to preschool because it is the main source of peer interaction that is so important at this stage of development. School is also a source of knowledge and as such requires higher level of attention. Play is still important for the informants. However, it is not seen as the main daily occupation but as a means of interacting with others.

As a significant figure in the school environment, teachers had a major role during the first few months in school. The challenges characterizing relationships with the teachers, could be said to be increased independence and responsibility in school activities for the pupils. The relationship child-teacher becomes subject to changes. Old patterns are adjusted or discarded, and new are learned. The teacher figure appears to be essential for the respondents - it is the authority which introduces the new rules and to whom problems are addressed. In social work terms, it could be said that the teacher is the one representing the institution "school" in front of the children and their families and at the same time representing the client "child and family" to the school.

The finding of this Bachelor's thesis that the author found the most fascinating is the interaction with peers. The school attitude of the informants in general was shaped around the notion of friends. Things were explained through friends and peers. As it has been mentioned in the literature background section of the Bachelor's thesis, friendships are essential for the developing personality. It does not become visible in what aspect friendships influence the individual but the point of the study is not only the influence of friendships on personality. Previous friendships that are continued after starting school are mostly possible if the friends are in the same physical environment. If the individuals share different environments, the

friendship is very much forgotten. Keeping old friendships and building new ones are among the challenges first graders experience. Making new friends was seen as an easy task by the majority of the respondents. The reason for seeing it as such could be because of the children's shared new status of pupils. The need to be part of the group and to be recognized is crucial for this age. One of the reasons school was found appealing and favored in comparison to preschool was the presence of friends. Friendship is not the only peer interaction the informants experienced. Another one is teasing. It was pointed by a number of children that they have experienced teasing and it was one of the things that they did not find appealing in school. It was not explored in this study what form the teasing has taken (physical, social, or emotional) or how profound it has been. Neither the ways of dealing with the problem had been studied. When talking about teasing, one thing that is essential to discuss is what exactly children understood by teasing. According to Smith and Cowie (1991, 108), aggressive behavior in different forms is normal for most children as long as that behavior does not disturb the group processes and activities. They also claim that bullying is a type of aggressive behavior which can be expressed in teasing (1991, 111). In any case, the problem of teasing should be taken seriously by caretakers as untreated aggressive behavior in childhood might result in serious aggression problems in later stages of life.

The topic of this Bachelor's thesis aims at presenting the informants' own perspective on the problem studied. Compared to many studies that concentrate on what the researchers think is essential, this one tries to give the informants' own views free of researcher's interpretation. However, such a task is challenging and demanding especially for a first attempt at research, so the author's goal is to turn the attention at the importance of giving the informants the word. Similar attempts characterize previous studies on starting school, also referred to as transition to school. However, the research on transition to school present a general picture of the challenges experienced, while the Bachelor's thesis tries to concentrate only on social and emotional challenges. As it can be noticed, the academic aspect is not at all considered here. The findings of this Bachelor's thesis show that it is important to consider the socio-emotional challenges related to starting school. The reason for that is that the challenges represent situations that occur more than once in a person's life. Building effective strategies from the start to deal with these challenges will influence future experiences in a positive way. In this sense, the findings of the Bachelor's thesis can be seen as essential for prevention in a more general and a long term aspect.

The findings of this Bachelor's thesis achieve the basic purpose of the Bachelor's thesis of presenting the children's feelings and experiences related to starting school. The amount of data obtained through the interviews was less than expected but still enough for the research. It is believed that technical difficulties in understanding concepts and expressing opinions in a foreign language posed a limitation on the quantity of data.

It could be said that the findings are more or less genuine concerning influence from the author. There are two aspects in which it could be argued that the interviewer might have had an influence on the answers given by the informants. One is that some of the informants knew the interviewer from before and the second one is that the interview themes and questions were designed to retrieve only a narrow set of information. It is difficult to say how much the familiarity between informant and interviewer had influenced the answers given. However, considering the variety of answers, it can be said that such dependency is not very crucial for the honesty of the results. Considering the second aspect - retrieving only information needed - narrowing down the research and investigating particular topics is essential for preserving the original idea of the Bachelor's thesis and eliminating additional information that might prove more of a distraction than necessity. The interview approach was preferred than ethnographic or other more observational one, in order to receive direct answers that will be more from the informant's point of view than the interviewer's.

In relation to previous studies and theoretical background, the findings of the Bachelor's thesis provide a crossing point for studies on transition and studies on socio-emotional development. Based on the information obtained from the informants (both teacher and pupils), concerning the importance of starting school in one's life, it becomes clear that the results of the Bachelor's thesis go along with the notion of normative changes. The normative change of starting school is essential and influential on many levels and involves making adjustments and developing new ways of acting.

5.2 Further Studies

The possibilities for future studies based on this Bachelor's thesis are numerous and of vast variety. This Bachelor's thesis does not have the task to present general and end results on the topic studied. The findings should rather be considered as a basis for future more in-depth research. The importance of the findings is to turn the attention towards what the children have to say for their own experience, seen through their own eyes and expressed with their own words. The findings can give a general idea to people working with first grade students what might be important for them and what might be underestimated as such to avoid future social and emotional problems. Another interesting topic to be further investigated is the relations between family members of a first grade student. The research on family of first grade students could be narrowed to different families' attitudes towards starting school and these attitudes' effect on the first grader. The findings discussed here can also be used for more detailed studies on, for example, changing relationships in childhood, understanding of concepts in foreign languages, the role of the teacher in the beginning of school, etc. Another interesting research will be comparison of the perception of school from the

position of a preschooler, a first grader, and a second grader with the social and emotional aspects being of a primary interest. Interesting topic to be considered is comparison between similar studies done in different schools. Also intriguing will be to investigate the social and emotional challenges children not belonging to the main culture experience when put in an environment dominated by the main culture.

5.3 Ethicality and Trustworthiness

The findings of this Bachelor's thesis cannot be seen as general in any way as the sample studied and the methods used do not allow generalization. In this sense, the findings are relevant only for the segment studied. As the study was qualitative, replication of the results or generalization of the phenomenon are not expected. Generalization is done in the study itself by systemizing in findings the most often issues the informants referred to. When it comes to the validity of the data obtained, it can be argued how valid it is. The only way in which validity was attempted could be said to be in the process of interviewing by asking similar questions throughout a single interview. In other words, a constant comparative method, as described by Silverman, could be applied. However, as it has been mentioned already, the amount of data obtained through the interviews is significantly limited. As the research method used is qualitative, reliability of the findings can be achieved through a reproduction. However, that could be difficult to perform because the informants, being children and using a foreign language, might not necessarily give the same answers if the study is to be repeated. A possible way of providing certain level of reliability could be in the process of analyzing the data. That could be done by having another person doing an independent content analysis and comparing the outcome of it with the outcome from this study.

As the interviewees were children, special care was taken when it comes to ethical issues. The three most essential issues kept in mind were: the participants' mental and physical wellbeing and interests. These were the primary concern of the interviewer and for that purpose consent was necessary for participating in the interviews. It was the responsibility of the interviewer to prevent any consequences that may be harmful to the children and their wellbeing that may occur from taking part in the interview. The environment in which the interviews were conducted was familiar to the children, in order to decrease the effects of vulnerability and lack of power that might be experienced by the interviewees.

Informed consent was needed by both the responsible adult and the child. It was essential to present the informed consent to the child in a comprehensive language. The child should be informed about the purpose of the research, the process of interviewing, time continuation of the interview, use of the results and consequences from participating in the research (Dunlop, Fabian, 2007). It was made clear from the beginning that participation is voluntary and

an interview can be terminated at any point. For the purpose, the interviewee's consent to participate remained open throughout the interview giving the possibility to withdraw whenever wanted. Written permission from parents/guardians was obtained in advance. In case the parents agree but the child refuses to participate in the research, the wish of the child is respected.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview themes for students

Theme 1: Self

You are a first grader now. How does it feel like to be in first grade?

What do you think was the most difficult thing in the beginning? How did you deal with it?

Try to remember what were your thoughts about school before you started. If you compare them with what you have experienced already, what do you see as different?

Theme 2: Relationships with others

You have new teachers now, how do you feel about them? If compared with your old teachers (in daycare/preschool) what is different between them?

What about friends - what has changed compared to before? Do you have more friends? Was it easy to make friends with new children? What are your thoughts about friendship now?

How would you describe your position at home? Has your relationship with your parents and siblings changed in any way? Please tell more if so.

Theme 3: Environment

How do you feel about school?

If you can remember life in daycare/preschool, what would you say is different between daycare and school?

What do you like the most about school? What do you like the least?

Is there anything else that comes to your mind?

Appendix 2: Interview questions for the teacher

1. What is your opinion on the transition to school as a stressful event?
2. How does the school support first graders?
3. What is done to promote their emotional well being and adaptation to the new environment?
4. What is your opinion on offering such support - is it needed?
5. To what extent you cooperate with other parties (such as family, preschool institutions) to facilitate transition?

Appendix 3: Permission from parents

Dear parents,

My name is Tsvetelina Dimitrova and I am a Social services student at Laurea University of Applied Sciences. At present I am working on my graduation work which is about investigating challenges children encounter when starting school from emotional and social perspective. For the purpose of the research, I need to interview first graders. Would it be possible to conduct an interview with your child? The interview will take place in January 2009 in school (during school hours) and, if allowed, will be recorded. The information retrieved will be anonymous, will not be used for any other researches or purposes, and will be destroyed after the research is complete.

If you agree your child to participate in the research, please write the name of your child on top of this page, sign the consent form bellow and return it to the class teacher before the end of December 2008.

Thank you for your attention!

Best regards,

Tsvetelina Dimitrova

Consent Form

I hear by give my permission the child who is under my responsibility to participate in the Bachelor's thesis research "Social and emotional challenges encountered in the beginning of school". The interviews can be recorded and the information acquired can be analyzed for the purpose of only this research. Confidentiality must be used in the work process. After the data is no longer needed, it must be destroyed.

Date:

Signature: