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# Teachers Enacting Complementation and Compensation in a Practice under Strain – Policy and Practice in Swedish School-Age EduCare

Karin Lager, Jan Gustafsson-Nyckel

**Abstract:** The aim of this study is to explore the way teachers enact policy regarding the tasks of complementation and compensation in Swedish School-Age Educare. As a result of numerous policy changes, school-age educare as an institution has undergone significant and substantial changes in terms of its social mandate, educational objectives, and content. In this paper, we investigate how these policy changes have transformed the everyday practice for staff working in these settings. We base our analysis on policy enactment theory, focusing on the way policy is transformed into practice. The research material consists of group interviews with 53 staff members interviewed in twelve focus groups, representing twelve different settings. The results highlight that enacting policy in Swedish school-age educare involves multiple interpretations of these concepts, being constrained by materiality in several ways, representing a mix of discourses in both policy and practice regarding the tasks of complementation and compensation.

**Keywords:** fritidshem, school-age educare, policy enactment, interviews, compensation

## Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore teachers' policy enactment regarding the tasks of complementation and compensation for the education of pupils in Swedish School-Age EduCare (SAEC). A historical and social pedagogical focus for SAEC was to compensate for children's different backgrounds and follow their interests and needs, as a complement to the family (Gustafsson-Nyckel, 2020). Since the first SAEC curriculum came out in 1998, focus has changed to complement the education pupils receive in school by doing something different than they do in school. Nowadays, the complementation task is described in the curriculum (Swedish National Agency for Education [SNAE], 2019) which points out that the SAEC should complement: "(...) the compulsory school, to a greater degree, in that learning be situationally governed, experience-based and group oriented, as well as based on the pupils' needs, interests, and initiative" (SNAE, 2019, p. 23). At the same time, the Education Act (SFS 2010:800) highlights the compensatory task and points out that the aim is: "(...) to offset differences in the children's and pupils' ability to assimilate their education." (Chapter 1, Section 4).

These two foci could be described as a double-coded policy (see Gewirtz, Dickson, & Power, 2004), aimed to create conditions for both complementation and compensation for pupils within SAEC. How this double-coded SAEC policy is interpreted and enacted into practice regarding these concepts is important to explore and understand both from an equivalence and quality perspective.

In line with educational reforms across Europe, there have been numerous policy changes in the Swedish SAEC since the 1990 s. There is, however, a clear shift in policy from the 1990 s when day care for school-age children was integrated into the educational system in Sweden and incorporated into the national curriculum of the compulsory school and later into the Education Act. As a result of these policy changes, the SAEC as an institution has undergone significant and substantial changes in terms of its social mandate, educational objectives, and content. This change can be understood as care being replaced by education. At the same time as the educational intentions have been strengthened for SAEC, reports and research (Lager, 2020; Swedish School Inspectorate 2010:2018; Swedish Government Official Reports [SGOR], 2020:34) state that there are major challenges when it comes to enacting these policy changes in practice. These challenges consist of poor conditions for learning, large numbers of children in groups, only 30 percent of staff with degrees and qualifications for the work in SAEC, and constraints in living up to quality standards (SGOR, 2020:34). In other words, the lack of resources has increased while at the same time the policy has been strengthened. Consequently, considering these socio-material conditions, it will be interesting to investigate this double-coded curriculum and then especially the relationship between policy and practice. The aim of this article is therefore to investigate teachers' enactment of policy regarding complementation and compensation in practice. The following research questions are addressed:

- How do teachers understand the concept of complementation within an SAEC context?
- How is complementation in education enacted within SAEC?
- How do teachers understand the concept of compensation within an SAEC context?
- How is compensation for children enacted within SAEC?

This introduction is followed by a brief review of the research area concerning the SAEC task of complementation and compensation. After that, policy enactment theory is presented followed by methodological issues concerning group interviews with 53 staff members in SAEC. The findings are presented from interpretative, materialised, and discursive dimensions regarding teachers' enactment of complementation and compensation in practice.

## Previous Research

From an international perspective, Bae and Stecher (2019) discuss different arrangements for extended education to children and families around the world. They also argue that different state organised community programs can strengthen the possibilities for equality in society.

From a Swedish perspective, Klerfelt and Ljusberg (2018) discuss the concepts of complementation and compensation regarding Swedish SAEC-settings. They argue for complementation as an issue of cooperation between SAEC and compulsory school among educational objectives and compensation as the SAEC effort to compensate for children's different backgrounds by giving them experiences they lack. Perselli and Hörnell (2019) report four different teachers' interpretations regarding what their work with complementation should involve: collaboration, working in the classroom, applying practical work and offering something that the school lacks. Andishmand (2017) reports that equality is currently chal-

# Extended Education in Germany between Complementation and Compensation: An Analysis of Extracurricular Primary School Offerings With Regard to Content, Frequency, and Range, in Connection With the Composition of the Student Body

Nanine Lilla, Marianne Schüpbach

**Abstract:** All-day schools, the most common school form with extended education offerings in Germany, are expected to complement regular hours of school instruction with a wide array of offers and to compensate for origin-related educational gaps by providing specific offerings for disadvantaged students. Complementation and compensation can only be achieved by providing extracurricular offerings within the all-day school program suitable for the respective student body. This study empirically investigates the extracurricular offerings at 300 German primary schools with regard to their content, frequency, and range, in connection with the composition of the student body. Descriptive findings show high prevalence of homework assistance, remedial teaching, sports, and music/art. Conducting latent profile analysis, three distinct profiles of extracurricular school programs were identified depending on the extracurricular offerings provided. Schools with a student body with lower levels of linguistic competence and higher amounts of immigrant students were more likely schools providing homework assistance and a broad range of offerings. Our results suggest that offerings partially meet the specific needs of the student body, but that the potential is not yet fully exploited in order to bring about complementation and compensation.

**Keywords:** extended education, extracurricular offerings, latent profile analysis, primary school, student composition

## Introduction and Research Questions

In Germany, the case of extended education has been stimulated in 2003, when the German federal government decided to invest four billion Euros in the expansion of all-day schools, a form of extended education, nationwide (duration: 2003–2009) (BMBF, 2006). This political decision meant a departure from the till then in Germany prevailing model of half-day schools. By extending the school day, the growing demand of – especially young and well-educated – parents for high-quality all-day care and education was to be met in order for them to be able to combine family and working life. Furthermore, after the first PISA study in 2000 had revealed that students' skills were only average in international comparison and linked to their social and cultural background like in almost no other industrialized country (e. g., Artelt et al., 2001), all-day schools – the most common form with extended education offerings which extend school days and expand learning beyond regular classes – were expected to provide optimal framework conditions for better education and equal opportunities (StEG-Konsor-

tium, 2010). Since then all school types have expanded extended education and provide all-day offerings (KMK, 2020). In 2018, 67.5 percent of primary schools were considered all-day schools. The majority of primary schools is organized as 'open-attendance' all-day schools [offene Ganztagschule] where participation in modular activities in the afternoon is voluntary for students (58.4%). Only nine percent of primary schools nationwide are 'compulsory all-day schools' offering compulsory extended education where students in certain school classes [teilgebundene Ganztagschule] (6.7%) or all students of the respective school [vollgebundene Ganztagschule] (2.3%) attend extended education offerings in addition to regular hours of school instruction. Overall, the proportion of primary students attending all-day school was 42.2 percent in 2018 (KMK, 2020). Even after the initial investment program has ended, the expansion continues. Today, there is a current political debate on the introduction of a nationwide legal right to all-day care for primary school-aged children by 2025. In the federal state of Berlin, for instance, already since 2010 all primary schools provide all-day school programs and are officially designated as all-day schools.

Political motivation aside, there is also pedagogical rationale in favor of a nationwide expansion and provision of all-day schools. According to Holtappels (2005), all-day schools follow four educational aims. First, all-day schools contribute to the socio-cultural infrastructure with regard to the reconciliation of family and working life and the provision of equal opportunities for learning and leisure. Second, in view of children's and adolescents' changing socialization conditions outside of school, all-day schools offer an expanded space for socialization and create an enriched learning setting, especially with regard to social integration and manifold learning opportunities for the acquisition of academic and non-academic competences. Third, all-day schools are further to be understood as a reaction to higher formal qualification and altered content-related educational requirements, and fourth, in response to the development needs of schools and the school system, e.g. regarding students at risk and educational inequality, which are to be achieved with the help of a new learning culture and expanded learning opportunities.

In conjunction with the advancing implementation of inclusive schooling, all-day schools also offer the possibility of realizing a new learning culture providing individual support especially for students at risk of academic underachievement both at the level of the individual school and the entire school system (Schüpbach, Lilla, & Groh, 2018).

Hence, put into the terms of this special issue, it is expected that all-day schools in Germany both complement regular hours of school instruction with a wide array of offers, and compensate for origin-related educational gaps by providing specific offerings for disadvantaged students. With regard to complementation, all-day schools are expected to improve the possibilities for individual support for individual students by providing versatile learning arrangements that enrich the development of students' academic and non-academic competence in an extended timeframe that extends beyond regular hours of school instruction. By interlinking the extracurricular offerings in the all-day school context with the learning that is taking place in regular lessons, complementation is further to be achieved by providing educational opportunities throughout the day and creating valuable leisure activities for all students. With view of the weaknesses of the German education system, which have been repeatedly shown since PISA 2000, in which the general level does not meet today's educational requirements and students' social and cultural background strongly influencing educational success (e.g., OECD 2019), all-day schools are expected to reduce origin-related educational gaps and increase equal opportunities by producing compensatory effects for

# Activities and Values in School-Age Educare Mathematics

Anna Wallin, Paola Valero, Eva Norén

**Abstract:** Based on an empirical study of policy enactment and mathematical enculturation in Swedish school-age educare, a conceptualization of *mathematics* as the assemblage of *activities* and *values* is proposed. Observations were analysed using policy enactment theory and the lens of mathematical activities. The result shows that making creations, describing relationships and addressing problems are mathematical activities evident in the practices of school-age educare. Values of plausibility, critical stance and connectedness are evident. This alternative conceptualization of mathematics offers possibilities for respecting a balance between education and care in practice. The result opens for alternative ways of thinking about mathematics as a complementing and compensating area that resists the tendency towards *schoolification* in educare.

**Keywords:** extended education, mathematics, activities, values

## Introduction

It is afternoon at the educare centre the Moon and children are engaged in various activities. I approach Gabriel and Michael who are sitting around a table. They are cutting out cardboard figures to build a city in which robots—that they had also assembled—can travel around. Gabriel designs a parking meter and calculates the fees. I ask Gabriel how much it costs to park. “Fifty kronor for four hours”, and he continues drawing. “Okay”, I say. “But how much is it to park one hour?” He thinks: “Well... 50 divided by... four...” Gabriel estimates: “Per hour it will be around 15 kronor, or we can say ten”. Michael objects: “It may not necessarily be division. This isn’t math... I mean, if it is 80 kronor, and if you park for two hours, it’s not certain that you should pay 40”. Michael continues as he gestures with hands and fingers: “If you buy three pieces of something in the store for 15 kronor...” He shakes his head, shows one finger and continues: “... and then you want to buy just one, it’s not certain one-piece costs five kronor”. I ask: “Why is that?” He shrugs: “I don’t know, maybe they want to earn money. One piece might cost seven or so...”

This vignette illustrates what could be considered mathematics in Swedish school-age educare. Children perform activities at will, based on their interests. The adult asks questions and invites children to explain. Materials are touched, cut and put together. Children’s stories and reasons for what they do emerge in conversation. There is a clear expression of what the situation *is not* about: “*This is not math...*” Michael exclaims when Gabriel tries to calculate prices using a typical school maths division: If a price for  $4x$  equals 50, then  $x$  equals 50 divided by four. Michael points that in their robot, paper city another logic is valid—it may not necessarily be division. As in a real shop, they also want to earn money for the price of a unit. Still, there is a logical explanation for the price, and it is reasonable.

The vignette captures the tension explored in this paper. On the one hand, the practice of *school-age educare*—“*fritidshem*”<sup>1</sup> in Swedish—has held an “exceptional position [...] promoting both education, care, play and leisure in a beneficial way” (Klerfelt, Haglund,

1 85% of Swedish children between six and nine participate in school-aged educare, *fritidshem*. While school is compulsory from the age of six, school-aged educare is not. To participate in the latter, a child’s caregivers need to be working or studying (SNAE, 2018b). For more details, see Klerfelt et al. (2020).

Andersson, & Kane, 2020, p. 187) for children's general well-being and development. Education in this setting prioritizes meaning making and playful learning in caring ways. On the other hand, recent education policy in Sweden has tended to extend the teaching discourse of compulsory school to school-age educare, aiming to improve student achievement in international comparative measurements such as OECD's PISA tests (Government, 2016). The term *schoolification* highlights the tendency to assimilate other educational settings into schooling in content and character, subordinating their own value and importance to the goals of compulsory schooling (e. g., Gunnarsdottir, 2014; Lager, 2015). We claim that the tension between the possibilities of educare and the tendency towards schoolification is visible when mathematics is made explicit.

In 2016, the Swedish National Agency of Education (SNAE) revised the curriculum for school-age educare to support learning in different areas such as mathematics. "Mathematics as a tool to describe ordinary phenomena and solve ordinary problems" (The Swedish National Agency of Education [SNAE], 2018a, p. 25) is stated as an aim. The problem emerges since the term "mathematics" carries a meaning closely linked to the practices of compulsory schooling which are characterized by structured content, with a high priority given to formalization and the dominance of rules, numbers and symbols, the authority of math books, and solutions that fit the right answer in the book (Helenius et al., 2018; Holmberg, & Ranagården, 2016). Such an idea of mathematics is strongly rooted in the collective experience of formal school education, probably shared by most school-age educare participants—adults and children alike. If not challenged, there is the risk that the views, activities and relations typical of school mathematics will colonize and inhibit the emergence of other possible meanings of mathematics that are pertinent to school-age educare.

Indeed, the limited research that explores mathematics in extended education has pointed to this tension. For example, Haglund and Peterson (2017) explored why practitioners use board games in school-age educare. They showed that supporting social competences and structure were the most predominant reasons. Learning cognitive abilities was a secondary reason that appeared when mathematics was made evident. However, practitioners pointed to the difference of the use of board games for the development of mathematical skills in the context of school age educate and in school. Harvard Maare (2015) points to the tension between teachers' and children' intentions for developing mathematical relationships. Game designs that allow peer collaboration and children's affect and motivation bring attention to mathematics in school age educare. Nonetheless, the nature or characteristics of mathematics are not interrogated but remain subordinated to the interactions. Other intervention studies in countries such as Germany have emphasized that participation in extracurricular activities in a variety of areas, including mathematics, supports the development of social and academic competences (e. g., Fisher, & Klieme, 2013). In other locations, such as Hong Kong, studies have highlighted general competencies and lifelong learning abilities, encompassing non-formal and formal learning, as well as mathematics (e. g., Sivan, & Po Kwan Siu, 2020; Bray, 2013). It is evident in these studies that the meaning of "mathematics" in extended education is not interrogated. In some cases, the mathematical elements seem intended to supplement school; in other cases, the presence of mathematics seems intended to amend for the children's lack of success in school.

In this article, we propose an alternative understanding of what could be labelled as "school-age educare mathematics" in harmony with the formulation of education and care. Since school-age educare has a valuable offering that combines education and care for chil-



# To Teach Undercover: A Liberal Art of Rule

Linnéa Holmberg

**Abstract:** School-age educare centres in Sweden have previously not engaged in teaching guided by objectives, but since 2016 there has been a legal requirement to do so as part of an assignment to complement the knowledge requirements in school. Through focus group discussions with children and school-age educare teachers this study explores *how* it is possible to teach in a voluntary educational programme such as school-age educare. The analysis problematises the voluntary nature of school-age educare in relation to the requirement to teach by using the concept *liberal arts of rule* while asking *what* can be governed and *how* one can govern in these centres. The results show that the children willingly participate in school-age educare since they experience themselves to be free and with great opportunities to play when in the centres. At the same time, the teachers fulfil the complementary assignment by disguising learning while teaching undercover.

**Keywords:** extended education, school-age educare, complementary assignment, advanced liberal rule

## Introduction

How does one teach in a context where teaching —by tradition— is not considered legitimate? This seems to be a task that is not easy to perform, yet it is a mission that Swedish school-age educare faces today. How this task is handled by teachers and how children experience their participation in school-age educare is explored in this article through a qualitative analysis of focus group discussions.

School-age educare, hereinafter referred to as SAEC, is an integral part of the education system in Sweden, constituted of both education and care – educare. Legislation stipulates that all municipalities must offer this kind of educational programme, staffed with university-educated SAEC-teachers among other pedagogues, for children in preschool classes, compulsory school and compulsory school for children with learning disabilities. Unlike the school, SAEC is completely free from knowledge requirements and mandatory attendance for children; nevertheless 85% of children aged six to nine are enrolled in this educational programme (The Swedish National Agency for Education, 2019a, hereinafter SNAE). However, SAEC centres are governed by the Education Act (SFS 2010:800) and a national curriculum (SNAE, 2019b) and through these they are regulated to *complement* the school. The curriculum requires co-operation between the different forms of education with an intention to enhance children's development and learning. The complementary assignment for SAEC revolves around offering learning that is situationally governed, experience-based and group-oriented and with a content that is based on children's needs, interests and initiative.

Since 2016, SAEC teachers have been obliged to teach while guided by objectives. During this time the term teaching was entered into a new chapter intended solely for SAEC in



the national curriculum. While the purpose, objectives and central content were clarified, the concept of teaching was given a prominent role: to teach *should* aim to stimulate children's development and learning, and offer meaningful leisure time (SNAE, 2019b). It is therefore through teaching that the centres should complement the other education forms in their implementation and fulfilment of the objectives of the curriculum (SNAE, 2016). In the Education Act, teaching is defined as goal-driven processes that, under the guidance of teachers, aims at development and learning through the acquisition and development of knowledge and values (SFS, 2010:800, 3§). The curriculum includes a supplement which states that in SAEC, the concept of teaching should be given a wide interpretation, where care, development and learning in the teaching forms a whole (for more detailed explanations of the Swedish SAEC, see for example Klerfelt & Ljusberg, 2018 and Klerfelt, 2017).

SNAE points out that the concept of teaching is controversial and debated vis-a-vis SAEC. In their evaluation of the new curriculum chapter a dissatisfaction emerges among the personnel in the centres, revealing opinions that emphasise that the concept does not belong in SAEC. According to SNAE there are fears that the use of the term 'teaching'—distinctly associated with the school— will reinforce an ongoing and contested schoolification of SAEC. The evaluation also shows different interpretations of the complementary assignment among the personnel, some indicating that the new curriculum chapter—with its focus on teaching guided by objectives— may lead to overly controlled activities, which is also considered too similar to the school (SNAE, 2018).

Overall, this indicates contradictions between traditional and newer ideals, implying a disagreement about what SAEC is or should be these days. This study, therefore, intends to highlight how this contradiction is handled by SAEC teachers in SAEC centres when assigned to complement the school by conducting teaching guided by objectives in a voluntary educational programme, and in relation to this the study examines how the children perceive their time in SAEC today.

## Aim and Research Questions

To make visible how teaching, as part of the complementary assignment, is managed in practice in SAEC, the study explores how children and SAEC teachers talk about the purpose of SAEC and about what they actually do when in the centres. Given the voluntary nature of SAEC, the aim is to problematise the requirement of teaching in relation to *what* can be governed and *how* one can govern in the centres. The analytical focus is directed towards the following research questions:

- How do the children talk about their time spent in SAEC?
- How do the teachers talk about their work in the centres?
- How is it possible to teach in a voluntary educational programme?

# Examining Children’s Peer Play-in-Action: Micro Dramas and Collaborative Play Performances

Ann-Carita Evaldsson

**Abstract:** In this study, particular focus is on micro-ethnographic studies of children’s peer play-in-action and how children create shared peer cultures through their collaborative performances in situated game activities. It will be shown how children create micro dramas in play that serve as cultural frameworks to i) dramatize and transform experiences from the outside world; ii) playfully subvert hierarchies and gendered orders; and iii) comment upon and unravel controversial issues in their social life. The data are drawn from three sets of video-recorded data of children’s everyday play activities collected during fieldwork in separate school and after-school settings located in middle-class and low-income multiethnic suburban areas in Sweden.

**Keywords:** children’s play, situated activities, peer cultures, micro dramas, micro-ethnography

## Introduction

In this article, attention will be given to micro-ethnographic studies of children’s play with a particular focus on children’s collaborative play performances in situated game activities (Evaldsson, 2009; Corsaro, 2018 for overviews). The study of play and games as situated activities implies a shift in focus from *what* children play—the preoccupation of more traditional anthropological studies—to *how* players actively contribute to the organization of play and games (Evaldsson, 2009; Goodwin, 2006). There are several reasons for studying play as situated activities (Goffman, 1961). A focus on children’s play as situated activities emphasizes the importance of investigating how children accomplish play activities in real life settings through jointly produced activities (Evaldsson & Corsaro, 1998; Goodwin, 2006). It captures how play forms a crucial part of children’s peer cultures and meaning-making, emotional sharing, and creativity in everyday lives with peers (Goodwin & Kyratzis, 2011; Corsaro, 2018). A focus on games as situated activities also locates children’s play in wider institutional frameworks. Of importance is that a situated activity has “transformation rules” or “frames” that define what experiences from the outside world are to be recognized in the boundaries of the activity (Goffman, 1961, pp. 26–34).

This study will foreground how a focus on children’s play as situated activities provides rich sites for exploring the often spectacular and innovative character of children’s collaborative play performances, in what will be referred to here as micro dramas. Micro dramas are characterized by the occurrence of something dramatic, recognizable and noteworthy. My interest in micro dramas relates to the ongoing improvisational and transformative character of children’s play (Sawyer, 2002; Schwartzman, 1978), and how children through their participation in collaborative play produce and generate knowledge of the wider culture beyond the

peer group (Corsaro, 2020, p. 18). Drawing upon perspectives from Goffmanian interactional analysis, linguistic anthropology and conversation analysis on children's peer play (Aronsson, 2011; Evaldsson, 2009; Goodwin & Kyratzis, 2011), I will show how micro dramas, involving dramatic and collectively performed actions, serve as cultural frameworks for children to address and transform controversial (moral, emotional, and social) issues in their everyday lives with peers.

The analysis draws on video recordings of children's everyday peer play activities that were collected at three separate fieldworks among elementary school children, in one middle-class setting (Evaldsson & Aarsand, forthcoming) and in two separate multiethnic low-income settings in Sweden (Evaldsson, 2003, 2004; Evaldsson & Melander, 2018). It will be demonstrated that ethnographic studies based on video recordings provide possibilities to study children's peer play (and the cultural and linguistic diversities it inhabits) in its' own right (Aronsson, 2011; Corsaro, 2018; Evaldsson, 2009; Goodwin & Kyratzis, 2011). Thus, rather than focusing on extended education from the perspective of the school or after-school program, or based on what adults/teachers consider important for children to learn, children's everyday life, their peer play practices and peer cultures form the focus of this study.

## Studies of Children's Play and Games as Situated Activities

Micro-ethnographic studies of children's participation in situated play activities demonstrate the importance of exploring the often dramatic and transformative character of children's peer play interaction (Evaldsson, 2009; Goodwin, 2006). Investigating children's peer play interaction in situated game activities requires in turn methodologies based on fieldwork among children in real life settings (Corsaro 2018) together with video recordings of children's everyday activities (Goodwin, 2006). Such methods are now a common approach in research on children's peer interaction and peer cultures for capturing the embodied and highly dynamic character of their peer play (see Corsaro & Maynard, 1996; Cromdal, 2001; Danby & Baker, 1998; Evaldsson, 2003, 2004; Goodwin, 1990, 2006; Goodwin & Kyratzis, 2011; Griswold, 2007; Kyratzis, 2007; Theobald, 2013). The methodological approach taken foregrounds the role of language and social interaction as deeply embedded in the accomplishment of play activities, which both encodes culture and are a tool for children's participation in that culture (Corsaro, 2018; Goodwin & Kyratzis, 2011). The linguistic anthropological approach taken to children's play is heavily influenced by the early work of William Corsaro (2018) on preschool children's participation in cultural routines (dramatic role-play, chasing, access rituals, and more) and constructions of peer cultures, as well as Marjorie Harness Goodwin's (1990; 2006) studies of preadolescent children's participation in a wide range of play and games (dramatic role-play, team sports, jump rope, hopscotch, and more) in their neighborhoods and at nearby playgrounds. Given the broad range of micro-ethnographic research on children's peer play interaction, my review in this section will focus only on a limited number of the existing studies. More specifically, I will show how ethnographic studies of children's play interaction can be used to challenge some of the tacit agreements that tend to reappear in more traditional research on play about the nature and benefits of children's play (see Schwartzman, 1978 for an overview). In most of this work, the focus is

# Supporting “Slow Renewal”: Developments in Extended Education in High-Poverty Neighbourhoods in England

Kirstin Kerr

**Abstract:** This paper explores how a small but growing number of schools in England are gradually extending their roles to act as, what I term, agents of “slow renewal”: supporting long-term change in children’s complex family and community environments, through a series of strategically-aligned, small-scale, locally-bespoke actions, intentionally planned to bring about incremental change. An empirical illustration of one such school is presented and its core features explored via four core concepts: socio-ecological perspectives on children’s outcomes, soft-systems change, assets-based development, and liminal space. Through this, the paper contributes a set of integrated conceptual principles on which schools working to support slow renewal can act and which challenge the values of market-driven education systems more generally.

**Keywords:** community schools, extended education, assets-based approaches, systems change

## Background and Aims

This paper arises from a keynote presentation I gave at the World Education Research Association (WERA) International Research Network on Extended Education in 2019, where I was asked to consider future directions for the field. In doing so, I reflected on lessons drawn from an ongoing programme of extended education research in England, which I have led individually and with colleagues since 2006. In general, this has focused on how schools can extend their roles beyond their statutory duties to address wider social needs, and more specifically, on how schools serving high-poverty neighbourhoods might help to address barriers to good education and related outcomes, arising beyond their gates, in children’s family and community contexts. A detailed justification for this focus has been provided elsewhere (Kerr, Dyson, & Raffo, 2014), premised on: (1) the stark concentrations of multiple interrelated inequalities and shrinking public services found in these areas, and (2) the opportunities for intervention which arise from understanding an area’s dynamics.

This paper is concerned with these possibilities, and specifically, the small but growing number of schools, with strong connections to high poverty neighbourhoods, which are starting to develop what I call strategies for “slow renewal”. I have coined this term to refer to schools which are: (1) making a long-term commitment to supporting change in children’s complex, multi-layered, family and community environments, (2) aiming to improve children’s outcomes over time, across all the domains in which it is important for them to do well—education, health, safety, housing, economic security, and community participation (Kerr & Dyson, 2016), and (3) are beginning to work through a sustained process of developing

strategically-aligned, small-scale, bespoke actions, which are responsive to and understood as part of a neighbourhood's local dynamics, and are planned to lead to incremental change.

At the outset, it is also important to note that this focus is somewhat of an outlier in contemporary developments in extended education. It is distinct from important and growing bodies of research exploring the growth and impacts of extra-curricular academic tutoring (e.g. Bray, 2020, Pensiero and Green, 2017), and children's academic and social development outcomes from participating in varied out-of-hours activities, particularly for disadvantaged groups (e.g. Schüpbach, von Allmen, Frei, & Nieuwenboom, 2017; Fischer, Steiner, & Theis 2020; Rollett, Lossen, Holtappels, & Tillmann, 2020). It does, however, draw on two established traditions which, particularly in the last decade, have lost prominence in the international scholarly literature, though remain strong in terms of advocacy. The first is the conception of extended schools as an anti-poverty strategy; to paraphrase Dryfoos (1994), if children from poor backgrounds come to school too hungry, too distressed and too unwell to learn, it is incumbent on schools to help ensure access to food, health and welfare services. Second is the idea that schools can help to revitalise poor neighbourhoods by acting to strengthen local infrastructures and support community development (Cummings, Dyson, & Todd, 2011; Morris, 1925; Warren and Hong, 2009). Schools which are working to support slow renewal provide an important link to these increasingly overlooked perspectives, while also helping to advance thinking around them (see also Lawson & Van Veen, 2016, as an important earlier contribution to this).

My purposes in this paper are therefore two-fold: (1) to provide a brief empirical illustration of what a school, working to encourage slow renewal, is doing in practice to extend its role, and (2) to begin to conceptualise core features of these emergent practices. The latter is particularly important as without this, the field will struggle to move beyond the presentation of one-off case studies and to enable the transfer of learning. This paper marks an important first step towards this, and I begin by briefly outlining the evidence base I draw upon, before addressing my main purposes in turn.

## The Evidence Base

I draw here on iterative and cumulative learning from a 15 year research programme, which includes multiple exploratory and evaluative studies of national, local-government, and school-led extended education initiatives in England. Distinctively, it has enabled sustained relationships with a small number of schools (the longest spanning 10+ years), generating rich accounts of how their roles have been gradually extended. It is through close engagement with specific cases and comparative analysis across them, that the emerging features of schools supporting slow renewal have been identified.

These relationships have been underpinned by the principles of design-based implementation research (DBIR) (Anderson & Shutack, 2012; Fishman, Penuel, Allen, Haugan, & Sabelli, 2013; see also Kerr & Dyson, 2020, for a practice-based account). Importantly, DBIR assumes that: (1) interventions are not static, evolving iteratively through multiple cycles of design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, (2) intervention leaders and researchers work in partnership, both bringing their expertise to bear and with researchers